

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Culture, humanism and intellect: Cardinal Bessarion as patron of the arts

### Thesis

#### How to cite:

Bolick, Laura (2014). Culture, humanism and intellect: Cardinal Bessarion as patron of the arts. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2014 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000eeef>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

# **Culture, Humanism and Intellect: Cardinal Bessarion as Patron of the Arts**

**Laura Bolick**

**Volume I**

**Text**

**Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Open University**

**13 May 2013**

Date of Submission: 9 May 2013  
Date of Award: 5 April 2014



## **IMAGING SERVICES NORTH**

Boston Spa, Wetherby

West Yorkshire, LS23 7BQ

[www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

**PAGE/PAGES EXCLUDED  
UNDER INSTRUCTION  
FROM THE UNIVERSITY**

# **Culture, Humanism and Intellect: Cardinal Bessarion as Patron of the Arts**

## **Abstract**

To date many scholars seem to have agreed that Cardinal Bessarion was a physical and spiritual exile from Constantinople who sought to preserve his national culture in the alien environment of fifteenth-century Rome. In this thesis I am seeking to re-open the debate about Bessarion's role and aspirations in western Europe as expressed through the mechanism of his cultural projects. I argue that, in his guise as a Roman cardinal, he endeavoured to establish a western identity for himself that furthered his political goals. Though he never rejected his Byzantine roots, the messages he seems to have conveyed through artistic and literary patronage suggest that he was working towards some sort of assimilation into his Italian environment.

By examining key projects that the cardinal patronised I identify strong western characteristics in terms of style and message. His major fresco commission for his burial chapel in SS Apostoli, Rome was executed by Antoniazio Romano, a local Roman artist, using stylistic and iconographic vocabularies that were current in quattrocento Italy. Bessarion then commissioned an icon from the same artist rather than from a Greek icon painter. In the literary sphere we can also recognise an effort to establish a library in the tradition of his Italian peers. And he even dabbled in the western technological advances in printing, becoming one of the first contemporary authors to have his work printed.

This thesis seeks to re-focus a spotlight on Bessarion as an immigrant who was not compelled to leave his native land but who chose to relocate. It is proposed here that the cardinal's cultural projects reflected his efforts to integrate and to succeed in his adopted surroundings.



# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	i
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	iv
<b>Abbreviations</b>	vi
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>1. Bessarion's Life</b>	9
The Byzantine Career	10
The Council of Florence	15
Italian Scholarship	23
Bessarion and the Curia	34
Conclusion	56
<b>2. The Chapel of S. Eugenia in SS Apostoli, Rome</b>	57
Bessarion and SS Apostoli	58
The Decoration of the Chapel	64
St Michael the Archangel: Iconography	71
The Apse Semi Dome: Iconography of the Angelic Hierarchy	82
The Chapel Project	89
Artist Attribution	93
Conclusion	99
<b>3. Cardinal Bessarion's Icons and Reliquaries</b>	101
The Madonna of the Holy Conception, SS Apostoli	102
S. Maria in Cosmedin	114
Icons for Political and Personal Use	117
Cardinal Bessarion's Reliquary	121
Bessarion and the Philosophy of Icons	129
Conclusion	133
<b>4. Cardinal Bessarion's Library Collection</b>	136
The Act of Donation	137
Marc.Lat.Z.14: The Act of Donation Document	147
The Collection	150
Acquisition	162
Context: Private and Public Book Collections	166
Conclusion	176
<b>5. Manuscript Illumination</b>	178
The Choir Book Commission	179

Bessarion and the Italian Tradition in Manuscript Illumination	188
The Decoration of the Greek Books	193
Conclusion	203
<b>6. Bessarion and the Printed Book</b>	<b>205</b>
Bessarion's Collection	207
Sweynheym and Pannartz and the Classical Programme	210
Bessarion's Own Printed Texts: <i>In calumniatorem platonis</i>	217
Printing in the North	220
Conclusion	229
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>231</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>List of Primary Sources</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>244</b>

# Acknowledgements

This study has been assisted in innumerable ways by many institutions and individuals. In the first instance, the Charter Scholarship, provided by the Open University, made the research possible. Thanks to the Francis Haskell Memorial Fund, I spent two fruitful months in Italy at the British School in Rome, where I was fortunate enough to benefit from and participate in the vibrant community at the School. The staff members were exceptionally supportive and helpful and I should make particular mention of Maria Pia Malvezzi who contrived to get me access to all manner of churches and archives in Rome. I would also like to thank the director, Christopher Smith, whose warm and generous welcome was much appreciated.

In Venice I was given invaluable help by the librarians at the Biblioteca Marciana who patiently endeavoured to meet my many requests over the course of a sunny month in February 2010. Special thanks also go to the staff of the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena who supplied me with a mountain of literature and access to Bessarion's choir books along with their enthusiasm and interest in my project.

Where possible I have tried to acknowledge individual contributions to the text but several people deserve special mention for their assistance above and beyond the call of duty. I learned from and was helped immeasurably by Dr Carol M. Richardson, University of Edinburgh, whose lively enthusiasm and expertise were indispensable guiding forces. More recently, Dr Kim Woods, Open University, has overseen the evolution of this study into a dissertation and has demonstrated great forbearance in the supervision of the writing. In the last year Dr Kathleen Christian, Open University, has also drawn my attention to new angles with her fresh pair of eyes. Thanks are also owed to Professor Ian Campbell who was the first sounding board for the main thesis of this dissertation and whose intellectual energy was an inspiration during my stay in Rome.

I am also grateful to my examiners, Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou, Open University and Dr Donal Cooper, University of Cambridge for a viva that exceeded all expectations and their encouraging support in the aftermath.

# Abbreviations

ASR	Archivio di Stato Roma
ASV	Archivio Segreto Vaticano
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
BL	British Library
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina

## Introduction

Cardinal Bessarion (1402/3-72) was a Greek Orthodox monk who joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1440 in order to accept Pope Eugenius IV's offer of a cardinal's hat in the aftermath of the Council of Florence. He is best known for the library he amassed and donated to the Republic of Venice, where it is housed today, virtually intact, in the Biblioteca Marciana.

While it is true to say that there is no shortage of work on Cardinal Bessarion, this thesis presents a controversial reassessment of his cultural projects as the product of his deliberate adoption of western practice and tradition during his Roman career. I do not suggest that he denied his Greek heritage: on the contrary he celebrated it and used it to enrich his new western outlook, but it should be seen as one of the tools to advance his career and status in the West rather than as the definition of his identity. Over the course of this study it has become clear that the conclusions raise as many questions as they answer.

This is because the cardinal's engagement with culture – in the form of art and literature – was inextricably entwined with his political, social and intellectual life. While this is not an unusual phenomenon in a patron, in Bessarion's case his role in the arts of the mid fifteenth century could not be understood without a detailed assessment of his papal career, his scholarship and his theology. As existing work on Bessarion tends to be compartmentalized, examining either his arts activities or his identity as a historical figure, I hope that this thesis offers a contribution to our understanding of a complex figure who interacted with his cultural environment in what I argue was a manner typical of a quattrocento Italian ecclesiastical dignitary.

This study began as an art-historical examination of Bessarion's library collection and, as it became clear that his involvement in arts projects extended beyond the collection of decorated books, it developed into an interdisciplinary examination of the cardinal's cultural patronage. The initial exploration of the illumination of Bessarion's books generated a theory, which can be extended to most of his commissions, that he had adopted a western outlook that was expressed through his patronage of the arts. This conclusion departs from the usual interpretation of the cardinal's agenda as the promotion of his Byzantine heritage.

The argument of this thesis is that Cardinal Bessarion supported his integration into a western environment by way of the visual and literary cultural projects that he commissioned. It is proposed here that he embraced western cultural values when he moved from Constantinople to Italy with the result that his behaviour demonstrated that he had adopted the cultural values of his new homeland. Whilst it is not suggested that he renounced his Greek background, it will be argued that the profile he cultivated was one of an Italian ecclesiastical dignitary, papal ambassador and humanist intellectual.

Bessarion is traditionally considered to be part of the Greek diaspora on the eve of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> In reality he left for Rome thirteen years before the Fall of Constantinople. It was clear that the 'end' of the Byzantine capital was a likely outcome within the cardinal's lifetime, however he was part of an exodus from the Empire that took the long view rather than that reacted to an immediate threat. This undermines his identity as an exile or refugee, a status that implies an involuntary compulsion to uproot without any positive motivation to settle elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> So, is it more accurate to define Bessarion as an expatriate? Tropes surrounding this concept convey an idea of choice and agency. The scholar Vrinder Kalra in his study on diasporas

---

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Mohler in his book, *Kardinal Bessarion* and Henri Vast in his publication, *Le cardinal Bessarion* are the main proponents of this conclusion. More recently, Jonathan Harris speaks of Bessarion as one of the Greek refugee scholars in his work *Greek Emigres in the West*, while as recently as 2012 the delegates at the conference hosted by the Centre for Hellenic Studies (*An Immortal Debate: Philosophy and Ideology between Late Byzantium and Modern Greece*) referred to Bessarion as one of the Greek exiles of Rome in the fifteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> Walbeck, 'The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool', 229.

and hybridity, makes the observation that ‘...implicit in the conceptualization of expats...is a sense of return.’<sup>3</sup> While Kalra was writing about a much more modern period, it could be argued that there is value in considering these issues in the context of the fifteenth century since Bessarion’s status in Latin and Greek eyes as an expatriate or as a refugee is rarely examined. There is no evidence that Bessarion anticipated an eventual return to his homeland even before this possibility was eliminated in 1453. It is my contention in this thesis that the cardinal’s priority was to assimilate into his new environment at the expense of his cultural origins. This hypothesis can be illustrated in the examination of his patronage projects that follows.

To date most of the studies which focus on Bessarion’s cultural patronage have concluded that he was trying to straddle two cultures. In the nineteenth century Henri Vast was the first to publish the alleged quotation from Lorenzo Valla that Bessarion was ‘the most Greek of the Greeks and the most Latin of the Latins.’<sup>4</sup> Vast was the source of the theory, in his biography of the cardinal, that Bessarion was a man who represented Byzantium in Rome. Fifty years later, in the 1920s, the German historian Ludwig Mohler produced a study of Bessarion to accompany a collection of primary sources related to the cardinal. His biography, which is considered the definitive version of Bessarion’s life, perpetuated the identification of the cardinal as a man with a foot in both camps. More recently, the art historians Fabrizio Lollini, and Vitaliano Tiberia have all played down the cardinal’s attempts to assimilate in favour of putting a Greek interpretation on his commission to fresco his burial chapel. In studies of the cardinal’s writings, John Monfasani goes so far as to suggest Bessarion never mastered Latin to a degree that would permit him to communicate his philosophies to fellow scholars. As far as Bessarion’s renowned library collection is concerned, the Greek and Latin collections have been studied independently of each other particularly by Lotte Labowsky, Concetta Bianca and Elpidio Mioni. However, these efforts to isolate the collections by language could be argued to have generated a distorted picture of the library. When it is considered as a holistic cultural project, it becomes evident that this was more a collection put together with

---

<sup>3</sup> Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, *Diaspora and Hybridity*, 113.

<sup>4</sup> ‘...inter Graecos Graecissimus et inter Latinos Latinissimus’. Monfasani points out that the source for this reported quote is Pietro Ransano’s *Annales*, written in 1470. Monfasani, *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy*, 166 and idem, ‘Bessarion, Valla, Agricola, and Erasmus’, 319, n. 2.



the Latin humanist in mind rather than an effort to preserve Greek heritage for the sake of the Byzantines. It is the purpose of this study to engage with these Greek-leaning assessments of Cardinal Bessarion and, departing from these long-held theories, to propose an alternative interpretation of his life as one of assimilation to his new homeland in the West.

Bessarion's patronage did not take place in a vacuum, and it is necessary to establish the context for his commissions by looking at his political and ecclesiastical life in Italy. In examining his career from 1440 onwards, it becomes clear that the cardinal's political activity reflected that same assimilation to the West that can be identified in his literary and visual projects. Generally it is agreed that the pivotal moment in his life was the Council of Florence which resulted in him becoming a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. In light of the reality that this act was interpreted by many of his Greek contemporaries as a rejection of his homeland, I am proposing that Bessarion's behaviour should be re-evaluated. Swimming against the tide, Bessarion seems to have had a strong belief that the Churches should be united (a conviction that by its very nature was more acceptable to Roman Catholics than to the Byzantines).

A fundamental expression of Bessarion's agenda can be found in the device that he had designed for his coats of arms (Figure 44 and 45). The arms consist of a shield with a cross (transected top and bottom with horizontal bars), clasped by two arms in red and white sleeves which might be suggested to represent the Byzantine and Latin churches. Above this Cross there is a cloud emitting rays and the whole shield is surmounted by a cardinal's hat. Although it cannot be categorically proved, it is possible to suggest that the Cross with its dismembered arms seems to be a comment on an issue that was fundamental to Bessarion: the union of the Latin and Greek churches. The cardinal was defining himself as the facilitator of union between the East and West churches – the two arms representing each institution. He may also have identified himself as one of each of those arms: the embodiment of a union. Bessarion's position as cardinal was referred to by the red hat.

Although the cardinal never seems to have considered himself to have repudiated his Byzantine heritage, it is argued here his commitment to the promotion of the papal agenda in his role as a cardinal and his faultless loyalty to no less than six popes who spanned his lifetime demonstrated that he made a choice to embrace the West at the expense of Byzantium, given the degree of antagonism that existed between the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches. It is against this political background that Bessarion's commissioning programme should be understood. Like other Latin churchmen, such as Guillaume d'Estouteville, Domenico Domenichi, Giuliano della Rovere and Pietro Barbo, he patronised projects that served to elevate his status as a high ranking ecclesiastic. In Bessarion's particular case, his cultural projects also contributed to his acceptance into his western surroundings in the eyes of his Italian contemporaries.

The present study proceeds to examine one of Bessarion's most important commissions: the decorated burial chapel in the cardinal's titular church of SS Apostoli, Rome. By hiring the Roman artist Antoniazio Romano who worked in an Italian idiom and stylistic vocabulary, the outcome was to present Bessarion to his peers in the guise of a Roman cardinal, not of a Greek monk. It is strongly suggested here that the iconography – scenes representing two miraculous appearances of St Michael in the form of a bull – had a western rather than Byzantine heritage.

Besides commissioning wall paintings, Bessarion also collected, commissioned and donated icons for personal and public use. This is an ostensibly Greek medium but arguably Bessarion's interest and use of Byzantine panel paintings had a very western flavour. Scholars have maintained that this activity was evidence that Bessarion endeavoured to preserve his Byzantine heritage. I would propose that the reality was that the cardinal complied with western traditions. Two of the most significant commissions for icons that he had made seem to support this theory. In his burial chapel he once again asked the Roman artist Antoniazio Romano to execute a panel of the Madonna and Child to hang over the altar, and in the church of S. Maria in Cosmedin, Rome, he asked the same painter to 'renew' the thirteenth-century icon he had donated. These icons had immense significance for Bessarion, and to entrust them to a Roman painter, rather than a Greek artist,

speaks volumes about his efforts to use art to define his western character. The argument of expediency is often put forward to suggest that Bessarion chose a Roman painter for these commissions because there was not a Greek alternative. However, the cardinal's close links with Venice and Crete where Byzantine artists could be hired, coupled with Bessarion's capacity to sponsor out of work Greeks in his entourage, would imply that he had the option to find a Greek painter but wanted a local, western artist instead.

Despite the importance of the visual projects that the cardinal commissioned, Bessarion is most renowned for his library which formed the core collection of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. Approximately 500 books in his library were in Greek, and this has historically been interpreted as evidence that Bessarion was preserving his native heritage in an effort to salvage as many classics as he could after the Fall of Constantinople. Although there is no doubt that on one level the cardinal was seeking to protect a Byzantine literary tradition that he perceived to be under threat from the Ottomans, this study will seek to reposition his efforts to form a book collection as an exercise with several aims, only one of which was to preserve Byzantine literature for the consumption of the West. An examination of the library could also lead to the conclusion that the collection reflected the interests of Latin humanist scholars in the Greek language in general and in Neoplatonic philosophers in particular. Furthermore, this thesis takes issue with the practice of looking at Bessarion's Latin and Greek books as isolated collections and considers the whole library. He owned nearly as many books in Latin as in Greek, and it will be demonstrated that the whole picture strongly suggests western tastes and preoccupations were significant factors in the formation of the collection. In the course of the research, it became clear that Bessarion was creating a library which catered predominantly for Latin fifteenth-century scholars.

Contrary to the time-worn belief that Bessarion had little interest in the decoration of his books, he was actually an enthusiastic patron of illuminated manuscripts. Following a concentrated survey of the cardinal's texts in the Biblioteca Marciana, Venice it became evident that there is a high proportion of illustrated books among them. By commissioning decoration for his luxury books, he

demonstrated a preference for Italian style illumination. In general, a larger fraction of the Latin texts than the Greek books are illuminated, which has led to the hypothesis that Bessarion's priorities in his collection of Greek and Latin language texts were different. In my discussion of this theory I will propose that he was sensitive to cultural traditions in book decoration: at this stage Byzantine book illumination was in decline while the western practice was flourishing. Bessarion's ownership of these luxury books would seem to suggest that he harboured an enthusiasm for books decorated in the western fashion. In support of this thesis there are even a handful of Greek texts that are illustrated in a very Italian style. It is telling that his most significant commission in this medium was once again the product of the West: a series of magnificent choir books which were initially destined for a Franciscan monastery in Constantinople but ended up in the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena.

A study of Bessarion's main cultural projects should include his involvement in the developing printing industry in Rome and France in the 1460s and 1470s. Historically there have been few attempts to assess Bessarion's contribution to this emerging industry. By harnessing this technology developed in the West, Bessarion became one of the earliest contemporary writers in print, using the medium to promote his position in the Aristotle-Plato controversy and to advance his propaganda campaign for a Crusade. He was a patron of scholars who were closely involved in editorial work and who reflected the cardinal's intellectual agenda in a printing programme in Rome. Bessarion's engagement with this western phenomenon focused on the promotion of Latin works – there is little evidence that he was involved in developing a programme of printing Greek, even in translation.

In the end, this thesis follows the journey of one individual and his degree of Latinization after his move to Rome but it raises larger questions regarding Byzantine identity in Italy during the Renaissance. Those who write about fifteenth-century Hellenic identity do not frequently distinguish between two very different types of Byzantine émigré. Bessarion was not typical of the post-Fall exile: he elected to leave Constantinople thirteen years before the end. He left to pursue a

political-ecclesiastical career in the West and should be seen as an immigrant rather than a refugee. Clearly, even several years before the Fall, it was evident that Constantinople was in trouble but those who left in the years before 1453 had the time to see their departure as a strategic decision not as a knee-jerk reaction to immediate peril. This theory that arrivals from Greece to Italy should be seen as two distinct groups in which Bessarion represented the voluntary immigrant needs to be further explored in future discussions on the Greek diaspora of the fifteenth century.

A further fruitful source of investigation, which the present study has merely highlighted, lies in the issues of immigration and exile in terms of Bessarion's cultural identity. Scholars have used the terms immigrant and refugee interchangeably when describing the cardinal despite the significant differences in their definitions. Literature on the status of the expatriate in the quattrocento is hard to come by even though there is a proliferation of studies on the subject, focusing on other periods. Having consulted a group of these works, it became evident that many conclusions were not applicable to the fifteenth century as the cultural and racial pressures of more modern periods were very different. However, it is clear that both Bessarion's perceptions of his identity in relation to his abandoned homeland and the attitude of the host society towards him must have had an impact on his actions and on the messages he endeavoured to express through his cultural projects.

## Chapter 1: Bessarion's Life

Bessarion's political, ecclesiastical and intellectual life was shaped by two distinct cultures: Greek and Latin. Although he began his career as a Greek monk and bishop, he made a dramatic departure from his cultural background when he became a Roman Catholic cardinal. Arguably, this shift of allegiance was the pivotal moment in his life and can be attributed to his participation in the Council of Florence (1438-39). From then on, his identity was increasingly bound up with the Latin rather than the Greek Church, and as a cardinal he had an important career in the service of the popes. Although historians have identified him primarily as a Greek serving the Western Church, in practice his political and cultural life was firmly grounded in his Latin environment. His programme of patronage demonstrates this western identity. In stressing that Bessarion should be understood primarily as a western Roman Catholic, this chapter departs from the received view of this cardinal and his activities.

The definitive biographies of Bessarion were written by Henri Vast in the nineteenth century; Ludwig Mohler in the 1920s; and, more recently, Giuseppe Coluccia (2009).<sup>1</sup> All three interpret Bessarion as a man who straddled two cultures. They have attributed his immigration to the West as a shrewd strategy to advance the cause of the beleaguered Greeks through a position of power in Italy. This was indeed Bessarion's own claim, expressed in a letter to his protégé Michael Apostolis, but given that fellow Greeks were hostile to the cardinal's conversion, it seems problematic to accept uncritically what comes across as a justification. In other writings, the cardinal's frustration with these former compatriots is very evident. This chapter will engage with traditional theories about Bessarion and propose that our interpretation of the cardinal's life should be revised. Although Mohler has already looked at Bessarion's roles in the papal service, he concluded that the cardinal was a man who represented Byzantium in Rome. By contrast, it is argued here for the first time that the cardinal's actions primarily reflect his assimilation to the West rather than the preservation of his Greek links. In addition, Bessarion's cultural programme has not to date been examined in the context of his career

---

<sup>1</sup> Vast, *Le Cardinal Bessarion*; Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*; Coluccia, *Basilio Bessarione*.

trajectory. This examination will undertake to suggest that Bessarion's cultural patronage should be viewed in political terms as one way in which he asserted his western identity.

To support an argument that the cultural projects undertaken by the cardinal had a Latin rather than Greek identity, it is necessary to demonstrate that Bessarion had committed his political, ecclesiastical and intellectual life to the service of Roman Catholicism and the pope. This is one of the tasks in this chapter. By exploring this strong western framework for the context of Bessarion's programme of patronage, it is possible to posit that the cardinal predominantly expressed himself culturally through an Italian lens.

### **The Byzantine Career**

For the purpose of this thesis it is important to look at aspects of Bessarion's Byzantine career that shaped his later cultural identity since, like many Greek scholars, he was exposed to western ideas filtered through the Byzantine schools and he made western friends with whom he would develop later relationships in Italy.

By 1415 he was being mentored by the recently appointed Metropolitan Dositheos. Dositheos retired to Constantinople a year later for political reasons, but took the adolescent Bessarion with him.<sup>2</sup> As the cultural centre of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople was an important home for the education of Bessarion. Guarino Veronese, a well known Italian scholar who spent time in Constantinople described his impressions of the city in a letter to his Greek teacher in 1411, recording the appearance and intellectual life of Constantinople. He reported on the eloquence and learning to be found there. He was

---

<sup>2</sup> Apostolis, *Laudatio Funebris Bessarionis*, PG, 161, cxxxi. Stormon, 'Bessarion before the Council of Florence', 129. For Dositheos and his patronage of Bessarion see the article by Laurent, 'La succession épiscopale de Trébizonde', 93-94.

fulsome in his praise of the architecture and referred to the city as 'dignified and magnificent'.<sup>3</sup> This was the context in which the young Bessarion found himself being schooled by George Chrysokokkes in a rhetorical tradition that had significantly more historical continuity than that in the West. By reading and imitating the classics, especially the second-century rhetorician Hermogenes, the Greeks sustained the late antique tradition in rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this classical Byzantine education, Bessarion was exposed to the West which was well represented in Constantinople.<sup>5</sup> He was a fellow student of the Latin writer and scholar Francesco Filelfo, and in 1416 he met the book dealer Giovanni Aurispa and writer Cristoforo Garatone.<sup>6</sup>

Later Bessarion was tutored by Archbishop Selymbria, who directed several monasteries from Constantinople and was a renowned bibliophile and writer.<sup>7</sup> It might be reasonable to assume that from him Bessarion learned lessons of monastic administration, book collecting and authorship, skills which would feature prominently in his mature life. By 1423 Bessarion was ready to enter the Basilian monastic order, and two years later he was ordained a deacon.<sup>8</sup>

Bessarion's political career was established between 1425-27 when he took part in a diplomatic mission on behalf of the Emperor of Constantinople, John VIII (1392-1448) to the Emperor of Trebizond, Alexios IV (1382-1429). There are important implications for Bessarion's Italian career in

---

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Guarino Veronese to Michael Chrysoloras in 1411: 'Non mediocre vero fructum inter legendum assequor, quod non modo te audire videor, sed ipsam Byzantii urbem, dulce mihi spectaculum nutricemque benignissimam te duce lustror, omnia te narrante censo, non minus tua lutulenta oratione quam operum ed edificarum structura, magnificentissima templa regias circos aequeductus, columnas obeliscos portum, urbis ambitum, tuas cupressus et, aliquando studioli mei diverorium, hortum pensilem'. Quoted in Veronese, *Epistolario di Guarino Veronese*, I, Letter 7, 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> Monfasani, 'The Byzantine Rhetorical Tradition and the Renaissance', XIV, 176.

<sup>5</sup> Coluccia, *Basilio Bessarione*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Stormon, 'Bessarion before the Council of Florence', 129. Filelfo refers to his time at the school with Bessarion in two letters to the cardinal printed in Le Grand, *Cent-dix lettres grècques*, 112.

<sup>7</sup> Platina and Capranica refer to Bessarion's affection for the archbishop in their panegyrics to the cardinal. See Platina, *Panegyricus Bessarionis*, PG, 161, col. 105; and Capranica in Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 406. See also Stormon, 'Bessarion before the Council of Florence', 129. Herbert Hunger has written a monograph on Archbishop Selymbria: *Johannes Chortasmenos, ein byzantinischer Intellektueller der späten Palaiologenzeit*, Vienna 1957.

<sup>8</sup> Stormon, 'Bessarion before the Council of Florence', 129.



this appointment. Bessarion's links with the Palaeologan royalty may have made him a desirable tool for Pope Eugenius who offered him a cardinal's hat in 1440. The imperial position as an ambassador was also significant in establishing Bessarion as a political animal – an identity that would drive his western career.

In about 1431, still allied to Dositheos, Bessarion followed his mentor to the Peloponnese and settled in Mistra, a Frankish foundation near Sparta and the Greek capital city of John VIII's brother, Despot Theodore II (c.1396-1448). In E.J. Stormon's review of Bessarion's early life, he warns that this period is complex and insufficiently studied.<sup>9</sup> Although a shortage of literature seems to confirm this observation, nonetheless it can be determined that the young man apparently became involved in court circles and was credited by his eulogist Niccolò Capranica in his 1472 funeral oration with having reconciled the Palaeologan brothers, Theodore and John, who were arguing over the Constantinopolitan succession.<sup>10</sup> With only this eulogy to rely on, it is difficult to assess the degree to which Bessarion was involved in politics at this stage, but clearly he had some sort of profile in the Palaeologan court. However, arguably the most significant experience for Bessarion during his time in Mistra was his close involvement with George Gemistos Pletho and his academic community, which would inform much of the cardinal's cultural activity in Italy later on.<sup>11</sup>

His interaction with Pletho is critical for interpreting Bessarion's cultural programme in Italy. Pletho introduced Bessarion to the philosophy of Neoplatonism, a philosophy that would reverberate through his fresco commission, his book collection and his writings. Although Bessarion's exposure to Neoplatonism was initiated in Byzantium, its study became topical in mid-fifteenth-century Italy, as

---

<sup>9</sup> Stormon, 'Bessarion before the Council of Florence', 130, n. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Capranica in Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 407: 6-10. Stormon, 'Bessarion before the Council of Florence', 130.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed examination of Pletho's life and his philosophies see Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*. The philosopher's extensive views on government and the state of the Byzantine Empire are considered in Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, 127.

will be discussed below. Bessarion's interest in Neoplatonism had its roots in Byzantium but its high profile was an evolving western phenomenon that the cardinal both participated in and inspired.

Bessarion's relationship with Pletho is problematic, although the complexity of the situation is rarely commented on. Bessarion rejected much of Pletho's doctrine and took the study of Neoplatonism in a direction that reflected a western angle focused primarily on reconciling Plato with Christianity. When Bessarion engaged in the debate, which was raging in Italy, about the relative merits of Aristotle over Plato, he focused on reconciling the two and pointing out their mutual anticipation of Christianity, unlike his tutor who was violently opposed to Aristotle. Equally, Bessarion devoted his life to Greek then Latin ecclesiastical service so it is unlikely that he agreed with Pletho's view, expressed by the scholar James Hankins in his study on the reception of Plato in the Renaissance, that politicians and greedy clerics had debased religion in order to exploit the ignorant.<sup>12</sup> Pletho believed that the erosion of the moral and spiritual energy of the Byzantine Empire was causing its collapse.<sup>13</sup> This strongly suggests that he was alienated from institutional religion, whereas Bessarion actively courted and worked to shore up these organisations. At the Council of Florence, which both Bessarion and Pletho attended, the latter was against the Union of the Churches while his pupil adopted the concept as a lifelong ambition. Finally, Pletho aggressively criticized those he perceived as having given up their Greek identity to the Latins in despair that Greece would survive.<sup>14</sup> It seems likely that this was a criticism levelled directly at Bessarion who was the defector closest to Pletho.

On the other hand Bessarion was ever ready to praise his tutor. In his letter of commiseration to Pletho's sons on the scholar's death in 1452, Bessarion spoke of his former teacher's great honour, his

---

<sup>12</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 201. These views, expressed by Pletho in political addresses to the Emperor Manuel Palaeologus and to Theodore, Despot of the Peloponnese are discussed in Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme*, 67-83, 89-96; and in Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, 92-98, 102-08.

<sup>13</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 201.

<sup>14</sup> Monfasani, 'Platonic Paganism in the Fifteenth Century', 61. For Pletho's comments see Plethon, *Traité des lois*, 309-10.

glory that would never be obscured and how praise for Pletho should be eternal..<sup>15</sup> The cardinal also wrote, 'He [Pletho] was veritably the paragon of philosophy and every kind of wisdom.'<sup>16</sup> As Bessarion's tutor at Mistra, Pletho had promoted a liberal arts curriculum with an emphasis on maths and sciences..<sup>17</sup> In the academy, classical literature and ancient philosophies were studied through the lens of a host of Neoplatonic commentaries, and Bessarion used his early exposure to these as the basis for his own contribution to Neoplatonism in the West. Judging by the curriculum, it is possible that Pletho's goal was to spread Plato's teaching through the establishment of his philosophical community..<sup>18</sup> However, the philosopher may have taken his Platonism beyond a level of comfort for Bessarion by embracing paganism..<sup>19</sup> Pletho was accused of rejecting Christian theories of intercessory prayer as well as the Resurrection and the existence of Paradise..<sup>20</sup> Bessarion was likely to have found the implications of paganism unpalatable, and it is difficult to imagine that he would have shared them at all. He preferred to follow the traditions of the Christian Neoplatonists who focused on the concept of the Trinity with Man as the intermediary between the divine and earthly worlds, and thus argued that Plato had anticipated the Holy Trinity..<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> 'Nefas enim est similem hominem lacrymis prosequi, qui ingens honor Graeciae universae fuit, magnisque decor in posterum erit. Huius gloria nunquam obscurabitur, sed nomen et fama, cum laudibus sempiternis, in futurum omne tempus demandabitur.' *PG*, 161, cols 695-98.

<sup>16</sup> Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 470; *PG*, 161, cols 697-98.

<sup>17</sup> Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Contemporary rumours of his heresy were so widespread that the ecclesiastic George Scholarios felt compelled to consign Pletho's works to the flames after his death, making it very difficult for us to establish the truth of these rumours. The fragments of his *Laws* that survive imply that Pletho was indeed a neo-pagan. Schulz, 'George Gemistos Plethon; George of Trebizond; Cardinal Bessarion', 24.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the extant fragments of the *Laws* see John Monfasani's article, 'Platonic Paganism' in idem, *Byzantine Scholars and Renaissance Italy*, chapter X.

<sup>20</sup> However, John Monfasani argues in his essay on 'Platonic Paganism' that, although Pletho personally believed in a pagan celestial structure, it is unlikely that he actively proselytized any pagan views that he might have held since this would have been too dangerous in a rigorously Orthodox environment. Monfasani, 'Platonic Paganism in the Fifteenth Century', 59.

<sup>21</sup> Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, II, 94-97 and 282-83; Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, 74. George Scholarios rejected Bessarion's interpretation of Plato, Scholarios, *Oeuvres complètes*, IV, 131.

## The Council of Florence

On 11 November 1437, shortly before joining Emperor John Palaeologus' retinue which attended the Council of Florence in 1438-39, Bessarion was made Archbishop of Nicaea.<sup>22</sup> It is arguable that the potential of his political skills had been realised and he was being promoted to a position that would facilitate a role in Italy as a member of the Greek contingent. The Council had been convened to find a way to resolve the differences between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches and to bring about a union of the two institutions. Bessarion's participation in this Council should be seen as a pivotal moment in his life. His championing of Union identified him with the Latin camp in the eyes of the Byzantines, an association that may well have contributed to his conversion to Roman Catholicism.<sup>23</sup> It is at this point that we see the process of transformation begin from a native Byzantine to a Roman cardinal with a western outlook on politics and culture.

Bessarion's transition was dramatic. At the start of the Council, he is considered by Jacqueline Martin in her thesis to be a supporter of economic union with the West purely for the expediency of mustering western support against the Islamic threat to Constantinople. This was a common stance among the members of the Greek contingent. But, according to Martin, like most of his fellow Greeks, Bessarion did not deviate from the Orthodox position on the burning theological issue of the *filioque*.<sup>24</sup> However, by the end of the convention Bessarion was apparently convinced that full spiritual union was possible and that Latin humanists were receptive caretakers of the Greek heritage – a recipe that possibly motivated his cooperation with the Curia. On 6 July 1439 in the Declaration of Union, Bessarion declared his approval for the unification of the two Churches when he read out the document which began with a quote from Psalm 96:11: 'Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad.'

---

<sup>22</sup> On Bessarion's appointment as archbishop see, Syropoulos, *Les Mémoires de Sylvestre Syropoulos*, III, 23: 184-85; Apostolis, *Laudatio Funeris Bessarionis*, PG 161, cxxxiii; Platina, *Panegyricus in laudem amplissimi patris D. Bessarionis*, PG, 161, cvi. For a reference to the archbishop's selection for the emperor's retinue see Syropoulos, *Les Mémoires de Sylvestre Syropoulos*, III, 23:6.

<sup>23</sup> Contemporary Greek attitudes towards Bessarion's pro-western outlook are discussed below.

<sup>24</sup> This issue is examined more fully below. Martin, 'Cardinal Bessarion, Mystical Theology and Spiritual Union', 100. John Monfasani takes a very different viewpoint in his recent book, *Bessarion Scholasticus*, which will be discussed in detail below.

Although the Byzantines grudgingly signed the Declaration of Union, they repudiated it on their return to Constantinople in response to local hostility. It is evident that Bessarion was undeterred by the many disadvantages and slights the Union brought to the Greeks. This is the first evidence that his mindset was shifting perspectives. The West had much more to gain from this Union than Byzantium. Pope Eugenius IV was locked in a struggle with the Conciliarists of the Council of Basel from the outset of his papacy.<sup>25</sup> It should be asked to what extent Bessarion realised that he and his countrymen were pawns in this political game playing out in western Christendom. According to the historian Morimichi Watanabe in his article about Eugenius and the Conciliar debate, when Emperor John VIII Palaeologus agreed to meet with the Church it was a chance for the pope to dissolve the enemy council at Basel and reconvene it in Ferrara, thus undermining the authority of the Conciliarists.<sup>26</sup> However, Bessarion's interest in the politics of the Council of Basel may not have been developed as early as the convening of the Council of Florence. The Greeks and Latins met in Ferrara but in January 1439 they moved to Florence to avoid an outbreak of plague. Bessarion's support of Unionism bolstered the pope: it is clear that even before he became a cardinal Bessarion was acting as a papal man. One of the main issues that were addressed in June 1439 at the Council of Florence was that of the primacy of the pope, and the outcome was a triumph for the papacy against the Conciliarists. Eugenius certainly perceived the Council as a success saying, 'I do not know what more to ask of the Greeks, for what we asked for and sought, we have.'<sup>27</sup> The Dominican John of Montenero (d.c. 1446) issued the Greeks with a *cedula* (an official document) that summarised the message of papal sovereignty that Eugenius wanted to convey to the Baselians:

We define that the holy apostolic and Roman Pontiff is the successor of Peter and Vicar of

Jesus Christ, head of the whole Church and father of all Christians, our teacher too, and that he

---

<sup>25</sup>For more on Eugenius IV and the Council of Basel see Gill, *Eugenius IV*; Toews, 'Pope Eugenius IV and the Concordat of Vienna', 178-94; Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV, the Council of Basel*; Bilderback, 'Eugene IV and the First Dissolution of the Council of Basle', 243-53; Christianson, 'Annates and Reform', 198-207; Fink, 'Eugene IV and the Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence', 473-87.

<sup>26</sup> Watanabe, 'Pope Eugenius IV', 182; Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 21; Gill, *Eugenius IV*, 95-96, 99, 102, 206.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West*, 344, n.90.

holds primacy over the whole world and that the same See and Roman Pontiff in St Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, there was given plenary power of feeding, *convening, ruling and governing* [my italics] the whole Church..<sup>28</sup>

Primacy of Rome had different connotations for the Greek contingent, and the papal conclusion of dominance over both Churches was a bitter pill. It is perplexing that Bessarion is silent on this issue but it was probably another cause of his alienation from the Greeks. According to Byzantine theory the Church of the Roman Empire,

was governed by a pentarchy of the bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, who derived their authority from Christ alone, and who could define the dogma and doctrine of the Church only when all five were assembled and in agreement at an oecumenical council..<sup>29</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> canon of the Council of Constantinople (381) and the 28<sup>th</sup> canon of Chalcedon (451) had appointed Constantinople second only to Rome in the pentarchy, basing this importance on a myth that the See of Constantinople had been founded by St Andrew..<sup>30</sup> Asking the Greeks to submit to the concept of papal sovereignty as a condition for Union was unpalatable to the Byzantines. And the Roman Catholics were not particularly sensitive in the way that they dealt with this issue at the Council of Florence. Again, there is no evidence that Bessarion was disturbed by these slights. Three incidents occurred to upset the pride of the visiting Greeks. The first involved the expectation that the emperor and patriarch of Constantinople kiss the foot of the pope. Secondly, in Ferrara there was a dispute over the seating arrangements in the cathedral which ended in Pope Eugenius on an elevated chair above the patriarch; and at the conclusion there was even an issue over who would sign the Tome of Union first –

---

<sup>28</sup> Andreas de Santa Croce, advocatus consistorialis, *Acta latina concilii Florentini*, ed and trans. Georg Hofmann, Rome 1955, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Nicol, 'The Byzantine View of Papal Sovereignty', 173-74. For more on the issue of the pentarchy see Dvornik, *Byzance et la primauté romaine*, 101-23.

<sup>30</sup> Nicol, 'The Byzantine View of Papal Sovereignty', 175.

a member of the Greek or Roman contingent.<sup>31</sup> The precedence of the signatories seemed to imply a degree of supremacy. These slights, combined with the words of the Union document declaring that the popes 'possess the primacy over the whole world' as 'the successor to St Peter' and as 'first among the Apostles, true Vicar of Christ' were factors in its ultimate rejection in Constantinople.

Apart from the issues around the primacy of the pope and doctrinal discussions on Purgatory and transubstantiation, the main topic was meticulous and obsessive debate over whether the Son proceeded from the Father or whether Christ and God were of the same substance, the *filioque*.<sup>32</sup> To come to some conclusion about why Bessarion converted to Roman Catholicism and relocated to Rome, it is important to recognise the significance of this issue to the bishop. Having arrived in Italy upholding the Orthodox positions on Purgatory, transubstantiation, and the *filioque*, Bessarion executed an elegant volte-face over the dominant issue of the Council.<sup>33</sup> The Greeks had come to equate the acceptance of the *filioque* with Latinization, as expressed by an anonymous Greek bishop when he wrote, 'I will not accept the *filioque* and become Latinized.'<sup>34</sup> There were multiple, heated sessions in both Ferrara and Florence that veered from a state of stalemate to a compromise based on the idea that although the expressions regarding this issue in the patristic texts were different, the meaning was the same. Bessarion championed this philological solution. James Hankins puts forward the theory that Bessarion deployed his philological skills to come to the conclusion that the contradictions were generated by the flaws in man's understanding and interpretation not in the truth of

---

<sup>31</sup> The three incidents are described in Syropoulos and discussed in Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West*, 94-98, 107. See also his bibliography for the events of the Council.

<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the issues involved in the Council of Florence see Alberigo, *Christian Unity*; Papadakis, *Christian East and Papacy*, 390-408; Gill, *The Council of Florence*; Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence*; Gill, 'East and West in the Time of Bessarion', 1-27; Gill, 'The Sincerity of Bessarion'; Geanakoplos, 'An Orthodox View of the Councils of Basel and Florence', 255-78; 'Sevcenko, 'Intellectual Repercussions'; Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenikos*; Candal, 'Bessarion in Concilio'; Ware, 'Scholasticism and Orthodoxy', 16-27; De Margerie, 'Vers une relecture du concile de Florence', 31-81.

<sup>33</sup> Bessarion's initial views are expressed in his preliminary speech, delivered in Ferrara in May 1438; Syropoulos, *Les 'Mémoires de Sylvestre Syropoulos*, V, 11: 266. And his stance on the issue of Purgatory was delivered in *Responsio Graecorum ad positionem Latinorum de igne Purgatorio a Bessarione Nicaeno recitata die 14 Juni 1438*, ed. Petit and Hofmann, 13-31. Two discussions by Bessarion on the *filioque* can be found in his *Oratio Ferrariiae habita*, PG, 161, cols 531-42.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in translation in Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West*, 99-100; Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 147 and Every, *Misunderstandings between East and West*, 43-47.

the texts.<sup>35</sup> Bessarion wrote of his theory to Alexius Lascaris in his treatise, *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*:

The words of the Fathers by themselves alone are enough to solve every doubt and to persuade every soul. It was not the syllogisms or probabilities of the force of arguments that led me to believe this, but the plain words of the doctors. For when I saw and heard them, I immediately put aside all contention and controversy and yielded to the authority of those whose words they were, even though until then I had not been moderate in my opinion..<sup>36</sup>

Bessarion's efforts to find a solution suggest that he was convinced that unification was the way forward for both Churches and that he was inclined to seek compromise, a feature of his stance in the intellectual arena of Rome, discussed below. The future cardinal put forward the argument that the debate could be resolved firstly by establishing the correct versions of the Greek and Latin texts and secondly by understanding why the patristic authorities appeared to contradict each other..<sup>37</sup> He gave a persuasive speech that won temporary Greek support by way of a linguistic manoeuvre which achieved a compromise, equating the Greek word for 'through' with the Latin word for 'from'. Thus both parties could claim that the Son proceeded from the Father as well as through the Father. The Greek contingent accepted the revision for the moment..<sup>38</sup>

This philological approach to the problem reflected the admiration that Bessarion developed in Italy for the emerging tradition in Italian scholarship which was experimenting with philology in its treatment of classical texts. It is likely that it also convinced him that spiritual union was not only achievable but

---

<sup>35</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 223-25.

<sup>36</sup> Bessarion's treatise *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*, is printed in *PG*, 161, cols 321-448. Quoted in translation in Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 227; Ware, 'Scholasticism and Orthodoxy', 21; Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 222.

<sup>37</sup> Bessarion's practice of textual criticism is discussed in Labowsky, 'An Unnoticed Letter of Bessarion to Lorenzo Valla', 366-75.

<sup>38</sup> Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence*, 47.



crucial for the survival of the Christian Church. He was impressed by the scholarship of the Latin delegation, becoming friends with the influential Cardinal Cesarini. According to the contemporary chronicler Syropoulos they dined together to discuss Aristotle and to exchange gifts: Bessarion received three manuscripts from Cesarini.<sup>39</sup> and dedicated his translation of Xenophon to the Roman cardinal a few years later in 1442..<sup>40</sup>

On 6 July 1439 the Union of the Latin and Greek Churches was proclaimed. Bessarion was chosen to deliver the Greek version of the statement of Union over his more senior compatriot Mark of Ephesus who was deemed, according to Joseph Gill in his study of the main characters at the Council of Florence, too rough and discourteous to give a suitable speech..<sup>41</sup> By this act, it is possible to see that Bessarion was declaring himself inseparably associated with, what many Greeks perceived to be, the 'sell out' to the Latin establishment and the compromise of the Orthodox Church's independence and equality.

The Uniate position from the Greek perspective was an issue invested with deep ambivalence. While the Byzantines claimed an equal part to the Latins in the 'Roman' Christian legacy and empire, they were clearly championing a victory for orthodoxy and the acceptance of the Greek 'filioque' and ecclesiological positions..<sup>42</sup> They opposed the medieval Latin monopoly on primacy that the papal system sought to preserve. In Byzantine eyes, Rome had no right to the exclusivity in the succession of Peter. Christ had conferred a universal ministry on all the apostles which was transferred to all bishops who followed the faith. A successful outcome in the Uniate movement for the Greeks would have seen the recognition of the Constantinopolitan patriarch as an equal of the pope in the Christian hierarchy.

---

<sup>39</sup> A copy of Lactantius (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.43), a Latin Bible, and a Greek Euchologium. For details of the gifts see Monfasani, *Bessarion Scholasticus*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> BAV, Vat. Lat.1806. The coats of arms of Cesarini and Bessarion appear in this manuscript. Monfasani discusses the friendship between the cardinals in *Bessarion Scholasticus*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Meyendorff, 'Was There an Encounter between East and West at Florence?', 153-75.

The scholar Geanakoplos has proposed that the Orthodox priests also brought a more political motive to the Union table – they may have been attempting to use their political weight in combination with support from Rome to reduce the power of the Byzantine emperor over the Orthodox Church..<sup>43</sup> The chronicler Sylvester Syropoulos recorded that Patriarch Joseph said privately to a Greek priest during the Council of Florence that: ‘I hope that through the instrumentality of the pope it will be possible to free the church from the servitude the emperor with his privileges has imposed on it.’

The image of defection that Bessarion’s actions generated was enhanced by the pension that the pope offered him of 300 florins or 600 florins if he were to reside in the Roman curia..<sup>44</sup> Bessarion was not the first high profile Greek Orthodox to convert to Roman Catholicism: in around 1426 George of Trebizond abandoned the Byzantine Church; and Pope Eugenius made Isidore of Kiev a cardinal in the aftermath of the Council of Florence..<sup>45</sup> These converts alienated friends and colleagues. George of Trebizond complained in a letter to Bessarion of hostility lasting twelve years from fellow Greeks including his parents..<sup>46</sup> There is evidence that Bessarion himself suffered from the same sort of condemnation. John Eugenicus broke off his friendship with the cardinal in a letter titled ‘Before he became a Unionist’..<sup>47</sup> In reply to Bessarion’s text *Oratio dogmatica* George Scholarios wrote a treatise, in which he laments the loss of their friendship following the cardinal’s change of fortune..<sup>48</sup> This reference to Bessarion’s wealth reflected Scholarios’ opinion that pro-Unionists were ‘beguiled by ambition’,<sup>49</sup> and some held that their loyalty was purchased by the pope..<sup>50</sup> As if to confirm their prejudice Bessarion was awarded a cardinal’s hat by Pope Eugenius IV, which was seen to be (and,

<sup>43</sup> Geanakoplos, ‘An Orthodox View of the Councils of Basel and Florence’, 263.

<sup>44</sup> Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence*, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 166.

<sup>46</sup> Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 593, quoted in Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 22, n. 94.

<sup>47</sup> See Stormon, *Bessarion Before the Council*, 140.

<sup>48</sup> A fragment of this treatise survives, ‘Contre le discours de Bessarion’, Scholarios, *Oeuvres Complètes*, III, 100-16.

<sup>49</sup> Scholarios, *Second Dialogue on the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Syropoulos, *Les Mémoires de Sylvestre Syropoulos*, XII, 15-17, 568-72; Doukas, *Decline and Fall*, 181-82, 203-04, 208-10, 215, 252.

indeed, was) a reward for his political support over the Union..<sup>51</sup> Perhaps most distressing to Bessarion was the implicit condemnation levelled at him by his former tutor George Gemistos Pletho in the many written criticisms issued by Pletho about the idea of Union and those who converted to Roman Catholicism..<sup>52</sup>

Bessarion continued to write about and engage in the Union debate in Greece after he left Constantinople for Rome in 1440. Throughout his life he wrote treatises arguing for the union of the Churches and offered his support to the Patriarch Gregory Mammas who was under attack for his pro-Unionist stance..<sup>53</sup> It is evident that Bessarion was not alone in his position but that his response was more radical – he was so strongly pro-Latin that he had relocated to Rome and entered the service of the pope. The impact of the Council of Florence and the reaction of his fellow Greeks to Bessarion's beliefs were felt throughout his life and manifested themselves in the harsh words he delivered to the Byzantines in his *Encyclica ad Graecos* (1463). In what can only be called a rant he criticised the eastern Church for its obstinacy and refusal to accept the Union and the doctrines of the Council of Florence..<sup>54</sup> Bessarion blamed the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 on this failure of the Greeks. He affirmed his allegiance to the pope and asserted that the Roman Church was built on the foundation of St Peter and thus was superior to the Byzantine establishment. Bessarion then accused the Orthodox Church of forfeiting its authority by rejecting the Union. His motives for supporting the Roman Church were eloquently summed up in the *Encyclica* when he wrote,

... the closer death approaches the more the purity of the faith consoles me: in the hope that my belief in sound doctrine, for whose sake I put honour aside to cleave wholly to the truth, will compensate for my lack of works and bring me salvation .... What I might have had with you [the Greeks], I hold in little regard and the things of the present world - may God bear me

---

<sup>51</sup> Gill, 'The Sincerity of Bessarion the Unionist', 121.

<sup>52</sup> Martin, 'Cardinal Bessarion, Mystical Theology and Spiritual Union', 144-55.

<sup>53</sup> Martin, 'Cardinal Bessarion, Mystical Theology and Spiritual Union', 155.

<sup>54</sup> *Encyclica ad Graecos*, PG, 161, cols 449-90. See Martin, 'Cardinal Bessarion, Mystical Theology and Spiritual Union', 178.

witness - 'I counted but as dung' [Philippians 3.81] and would have thrown them all away, even if they had been many times greater and would have returned to you, never turning back, if I had not been myself aware that I was choosing what was nobler and more puissant [sic] to salvation; if I had not been convinced that the holy Roman Catholic Church was teaching and believing what leads to eternal life..<sup>55</sup>

Unionism was probably not the only temptation for Bessarion when he contemplated life in the West. The newly appointed cardinal was attracted by the new movements in scholarship which were germinating in Italy.

### Italian Scholarship

Nowhere is it clearer that Bessarion adopted a western cultural perspective than in his engagement with Italian scholarship. In *Plato and the Renaissance*, James Hankins describes how the fifteenth century was characterised by the evolving interest of the Italian scholar from literature and moral philosophy to the study of metaphysics and dialectics..<sup>56</sup> This fundamental shift was a feature that appears to have resonated with Cardinal Bessarion who espoused it and promoted its progress during his lifetime. The cardinal's translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, early after his move to Rome, is an example of his enthusiasm for the direction of Italian scholarship, which sought access to Greek philosophers and writers. For the purpose of this thesis, the important roles of Greeks and Greek studies to the development of fifteenth-century thinking will be focused on. Bessarion engaged on several levels with what we now call the humanists. He was an active patron; he was the focal point of what is loosely termed an academy; and he translated and promoted the study of the Greek language. Arguably his most significant role was his contribution to the debate over the relative merits of Aristotle and Plato that raged in the second half of the quattrocento in the West.

---

<sup>55</sup> *Encyclica ad Graecos*, PG, 161, 461C- 464 A-B.

<sup>56</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 164.

Bessarion's prominence in the Curia clearly made him a desirable patron, and he was apparently accepted as an influential person in Rome among intellectuals. Evidence for this can be found in examining his relationship with several scholars who profited from his sponsorship. Among them were Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481) and Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), writers and scholars who frequently praised Bessarion. Both men have left evidence of the complex and subtle relationship between client and patron that once again reflect Bessarion's assimilation into his local environment. For example, in Book 2 of Filelfo's Greek poetry collection, *Psychagogia*, Bessarion was honoured by being one of the addressees..<sup>57</sup> Filelfo also mentioned that he hoped the cardinal would return his copy of Plutarch's *Lives*, indicating that the men were actively exchanging books. Ficino also demonstrated his respect in a letter to the cardinal in which he lavished praise on him..<sup>58</sup> John Monfasani, in his article on Ficino's role in the Aristotle-Plato controversy, attributes this to a deliberate attempt to cultivate Bessarion in the event that Ficino's Florentine patronage collapsed..<sup>59</sup> This seems to be a plausible hypothesis given the mutually beneficial nature of the client-patron relationship – a phenomenon that was not unique to the cardinal and his clients.

Along with individual relationships, Bessarion was the centre of a group of scholars. This is an important demonstration of the cardinal not only participating in the developments taking place in Italian scholarship, but also taking the lead. Although the role of Bessarion's following in the later development of the institutional academy is not clear cut – we cannot be certain to what extent it functioned as an official body, his group can be loosely interpreted as a fledgling academy. As early as 1454, in a letter to Guarino Veronese, the apostolic secretary and writer Poggio Bracciolini quoted

---

<sup>57</sup> Filelfo, *Psychagogia*, II, ff. 36-37v. For a discussion and synopsis of this satirical work see Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, 120-37 and Appendix D, 215-25.

<sup>58</sup> Ficino, *Lettere*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile, Florence 1990, I, 35-36 and 246-47.

<sup>59</sup> Monfasani, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy', 188.

Niccolò Perotti's reference to the circle around Bessarion as an 'academy'..<sup>60</sup> Academies were beginning to emerge in fifteenth-century Italy, for example in Florence where the so-called Platonic Academy was established. However, these groups were not formal institutions and should be understood as fluid gatherings of men who met to discuss intellectual matters. Regarding Bessarion's circle, Perotti identified Theodore Gaza as its *princeps* and referred to it as the *Bessarionea Academia* in his letter to the humanist Stefano Guarnieri (d.1495) in 1470..<sup>61</sup> Capranica also mentioned Bessarion's academy in his eulogy at the cardinal's funeral in 1472..<sup>62</sup> Around eighty of the cardinal's familiars attended his gatherings at the palazzo attached to SS Apostoli..<sup>63</sup> How the group functioned is not entirely clear since it had no official structure. The writer Paolo Cortesi (1465-1510) described its activity in his *Dialogues*, published in 1490:

All day long erudite men discussed very great things. He [Bessarion] as a grand old man was able to argue both sides [of an argument], then testing his answers, for he had such a great mind and such force of intelligence that he could satisfy the little questions. For he read much, wrote and contemplated things....<sup>64</sup>

The men who attended were also described by the contemporary scholar and translator Giuseppe Camelli as 'Bessarionis Academiam sequentes', and their primary interests seem to have been philological studies and comparative work on a variety of texts..<sup>65</sup> This was entirely compatible with the trend in Italian scholarship in the mid-quattrocento. Training of some sort was apparently offered

---

<sup>60</sup> 'Quid Petrus Balbus et Athanasius [Chalceopilus], duo Achademie nostre lumina...' Bracciolini, *Lettere*, III, 239:18-19; Guarino Veronese, *Epistolario*, III, 622. Quoted in Monfasani, 'Two Fifteenth-Century "Platonic Academies"', 69, n. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Charlet, *Deux pièces de la controverse humaniste sur Pline*, 71, para. 7: 'Quod si in prohoemio solo tot errores deprehendimus, quid in reliquo opere poterimus sperare, quanquam scio multa illic et intellecta acute et emendata diligenter a Theodoro Gazae, Besarionae Academiae principe, cuius presidio usi sunt correctores?' No date given.

<sup>62</sup> Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 411:24-26: 'Domum suam academiam rectius quis dixerit tot tantisque ingeniis utriusque linguae gnaris ac peritissimus in omni litterarum genere viris refertam atque ornatam.'

<sup>63</sup> Coluccia, *Basilio Bessarione*, 233.

<sup>64</sup> 'Disputabant erudite homines totos dies maximis de rebus. Ipse grandis natu in utrumque partem cum repellendo, tum probando respondebat, nec enim tanta mens, nec tanta vis ingenii quotidianis questiunculis satiari poterat; legebat ipse multum, scribebat, meditabatur.' quoted in Coluccia, *Basilio Bessarione*, 234 from P. Cortesi, *De hominibus doctis dialogus*, ed. Maria Teresa Graziosi, Rome 1973, 56. Translated by Laura Bolick.

<sup>65</sup> Coluccia, *Basilio Bessarione*, 235, 261.

by Bessarion to a few young men, including the Venetian Lauro Quirini in the 1440s, the Greek Alexis Celadenus and the Italian Matteo Ruffo in the 1470s..<sup>66</sup> Whatever its semantic status, Bessarion's group was nevertheless an opportunity for Latin and Greek scholars to make contact and exchange ideas. Many Greek exiles were given refuge there and employed as scribes. The cardinal acted as the fulcrum for the interaction of two intellectual cultures.

### *The Greek Language*

Bessarion followed in the footsteps of key Greek scholars who had come to Italy, such as Michael Chrysoloras, and capitalised on the enthusiasm of Italians for access to Greek writing. By translating Greek texts into Latin (such as Aristotle's *Metaphysics*) and by protecting and promoting Greek studies in Italy, the cardinal made a contribution to western scholarship..<sup>67</sup> It seems reasonable to interpret these endeavours as a compulsion to expand the repertoire of the Latin humanist in Greek literature. His cultural patronage in which he acted as a conduit for Greek texts, art and ideas revealed a consistent effort to advance these goals.

Bessarion emerged from a tradition of studying classical texts that was alive in Constantinople. During the Palaeologan restoration, after the Latin occupation of Constantinople in 1204, the Byzantines were especially eager to preserve their heritage. The study of ancient literature as well as the Greek Fathers of the Church was the primary method of achieving this. The Greeks copied manuscripts and edited texts – for example, the scholar Demetrius Triclinius saved half of Euripides' plays. Efforts were made to imitate classical styles with the production of collections of letters written in the Attic style. Bessarion exploited the traditions of scholarship and the climate for learning that he had absorbed in the Byzantine world to develop the intellectual environment in which he moved in the West.

---

<sup>66</sup> Monfasani, 'Two Fifteenth-Century "Platonic Academies"', 63-64. For more information about these scholars see Greco, *Vespasiano*, II, 65-67; Monfasani, 'Alexis Celadenus and Ottaviano Ubaldini'; Charlet, *Deux pièces de la controverse humaniste sur Plin*, 25-26.

<sup>67</sup> Schirò, 'Il Bessarione e la Cultura Classica', 359.

### *The Aristotle-Plato Debate*

After a flurry of translations of Aristotle's works in the twelfth century, Aristotelianism became the dominant school in western Europe..<sup>68</sup> By the quattrocento, translations of Plato began to emerge, and James Hankins describes the philosopher as 'the chief authority' in a religious reform movement..<sup>69</sup> According to this scholar, the increasing popularity of Plato in the second half of the fifteenth century created a bipolar world in which scholars were divided into two camps: those who believed that Aristotle most closely matched Christian philosophy and those who supported Plato in this role. The controversy was at its most virulent in the exchange between Bessarion and his compatriot (another exile), George of Trebizond. Though initiated by these ex-patriots, the debate became a preoccupation for Italian scholars.

That the controversy was a predominantly Italian affair, motivated by the Greek scholarly community resident in Rome and Florence, is apparent from the list of characters most actively involved. The debate took place in a series of works and rebuttals generated by the dialogue between the work of George of Trebizond and Cardinal Bessarion. The Roman cast of characters – Greeks and Italians - included men such as Theodore Gaza, Niccolò Perotti, Andronicus Callistus and Michael Apostolis..<sup>70</sup>

From the period of the Council of Florence there was a spike in interest in Plato in Italy..<sup>71</sup> This enthusiasm was harnessed and promoted by George Gemistos Pletho who was part of the Greek contingent which came to Florence in 1438. His credentials as a scholar were evidently known in Italy

---

<sup>68</sup> Monfasani, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy', 182-83.

<sup>69</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 164.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Apostolis wrote a treatise attacking Theodore Gaza's defence of George of Trebizond. In response Gaza's pupil Andronicus Callistus published a counter-attack. Finally Niccolò Perotti issued a passionate rebuttal of Bessarion's critics in *A Refutation of the Delusions of George Trebizond of Crete*.

<sup>71</sup> Hankins' *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. provides an in-depth study of the way in which Plato was received and put to use by Latin scholars in the Renaissance.



as Cosimo de' Medici requested that he present a paper comparing Plato and Aristotle..<sup>72</sup> Pletho ignited a debate among the Italians, taken up later by the Greek émigrés, regarding the ancient philosophers' relationship with Christianity. He demonstrated that Aristotle could not be reconciled with Christianity since he had neither any concept of the life of the soul after death nor any concept of God as a creator. According to Pletho, Aristotle's definition of good was too material to prefigure Christian thought. He also rejected Aristotle's theory of Ideas and objected to the philosopher's value of the particular over the universal..<sup>73</sup> In a world where Christianity was steeped in Aristotelianism this was a shocking challenge.

Bessarion's involvement in this should be examined from two directions. Although predisposed towards an appreciation of Plato after the tutoring of Pletho, it was his exposure to the vigour of the Latin debates that ignited what would be a lifelong study. At the same time Bessarion's active input into the scholarship on Plato during his career in Italy sustained this revival of interest and constructively added to the Neoplatonic movement. Unlike Pletho, he did not agree with all of Plato's philosophies: Bessarion argued against the pre-existence of the soul; he commented on the inadequate description of the concept of a Trinity; and he naturally rejected polytheism..<sup>74</sup> On the other hand he praised Plato's emphasis on man's need for faith, and Bessarion claimed that Plato derived his theology from the Old Testament..<sup>75</sup>

Evidence of the importance of the cardinal's role in this debate can be found in several places. His book collection was renowned for the proportion of Neoplatonic writers and works by Plato that he owned. Among his friends and followers, like his fellow cardinal Nicholas Cusanus, the cardinal promoted the study of Plato and Neoplatonic writers such as Porphyry and Proclus. And most

---

<sup>72</sup> Pletho, *De Platonicae et Aristotelicae Philosophiae Differentia*, PG, 160, cols 889-932.

<sup>73</sup> Pletho, *De Platonicae et Aristotelicae Philosophiae Differentia*, PG, 160, col. 889-932.

<sup>74</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 235. For Bessarion's comments see Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, II, 83. and Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, II, 102.

<sup>75</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 236.

significantly, Bessarion published his major work *In calumniatorem platonis* (1458) in response to George Trebizond's attack on Plato as a non-Christian writer in his *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*.

By the time of Bessarion's arrival in Italy a handful of Platonic works were known to the West through very inaccurate translations..<sup>76</sup> This is evidence that the Italians were interested in the philosopher but lacked the tools to appreciate him in much depth. Cosimo de' Medici commissioned the humanist Marsilio Ficino to translate Plato into Latin along with the late classical followers of the philosopher. In 1438-39 Cosimo sponsored Ficino to establish a 'Platonic academy' where symposia were held, and in 1469-74 the philosopher wrote the *Platonic Theology*, which attempted to reconcile Plato's ideas with Christian beliefs..<sup>77</sup> Although, the launch of the Aristotle-Plato controversy is usually attributed to Pletho's speech, the scholar Jill Kraye proposes in her chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to the Renaissance*, that the Italian Marsilio Ficino should be held responsible for the initiation of the Aristotle versus Plato debate in Italy, even though he had had a very traditional Aristotelian university education..<sup>78</sup> He disagreed with the contemporary followers of Aristotle, declaring that:

they are not lovers of wisdom but lovers of ostentatious display, who in their arrogance claim to have mastered Aristotle's thought, although they have only rarely and briefly listened to him – not even in Greek but stammering in a foreign language..<sup>79</sup>

For a time, Ficino, Bessarion, George of Trebizond and George Gemistos Pletho refocused the Italian intellectual agenda on Plato.

---

<sup>76</sup> These were the *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, *Crito*, *Symposium*, the *Apologia* and the letters. See Blum, *George Gemistos Plethon; George of Trebizond; Cardinal Bessarion*, 23.

<sup>77</sup> See John Monfasani's article, 'Two Fifteenth-Century "Platonic Academies"'.

<sup>78</sup> See the Kraye, 'Philologists and Philosophers', *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, 149.

<sup>79</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Lettere*, ed S. Gentile, Florence, 1990 quoted and trans. in Kraye, 'Philologists and Philosophers', *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, 150.

The debate was based on the relative merits of Aristotle and Plato in terms of which philosopher best anticipated Christianity.<sup>80</sup> Platonists such as Bessarion, Pletho and Ficino studied Plato through the medium of the late classical followers of the philosophers who are labeled by modern historians as Neoplatonists.<sup>81</sup> Bessarion subscribed to the so-called Neoplatonist philosophies to such an extent that his cultural patronage strongly reflects their influence, as will be seen in the book collection and the decoration of his burial chapel.<sup>82</sup>

However, while orchestrating a revival in Platonic studies, the émigré scholars also made major advances in promoting a wider appreciation of Aristotelian literature in the West. It is sometimes overlooked that Bessarion was not a traditional Platonist who rejected Aristotle and adopted Plato uncritically. As mentioned, Bessarion translated a new edition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* while his follower, Theodore of Gaza tackled the *Historalia Animalium*.<sup>83</sup> Simultaneously Greeks were flooding into Italy after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 bringing better manuscripts of Aristotle's writings, and translators were among those who were able to provide more accurate versions.<sup>84</sup> There was a subsequent rise in demand among the public for new translations of Aristotle. The growth in Renaissance Aristotelianism was equally a part of the classical tradition championed by the humanists and the study of the philosopher was a means to emphasise continuity with the Antique.<sup>85</sup> In his recent publication, *Bessarion Scholasticus*, Monfasani has demonstrated that Bessarion was aware of the

---

<sup>80</sup> Monfasani's *George of Trebizond* contains an account of the controversy with an extensive bibliography, 201-29. See also idem, 'Il Perotti e la controversia tra platonici ed aristotelici'; Tatakis, *La philosophie byzantine*; Bianca, 'Auctoritas e Veritas', 207-47; Turner, 'The Career of George Gennadius Scholarius', 420-55.

<sup>81</sup> The concept covers any philosopher post-Plato who adopted Plato's ideas to fit the contemporary theological situation, and the group of writers ranged from St Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Porphyry, and Aelius to Proclus. See Kristeller, 'Neoplatonismo e Rinascimento', 25-37; and Hankins' two-volume study, *Humanism and Platonism in the Renaissance*.

<sup>82</sup> See chapters 2 and 4 of the current dissertation.

<sup>83</sup> Kraye, 'Philologists and Philosophers', *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, 143.

<sup>84</sup> A good summary of the Latin translations of Aristotle can be found in the article by L. Minio-Paluello in the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 1, 267-81. See also Garin, 'Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele nel secolo XV', 55-104; Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, 68.

<sup>85</sup> Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, 108.

Scholastic traditions, which were based on Aristotle, from his years in Constantinople. Indeed he studied and commented on the works of Thomas Aquinas in some depth..<sup>86</sup>

Wherever the Aristotle-Plato controversy originated, the debate is summed up in its most sophisticated manner in the dialogue between George of Trebizond's *Comparatio Platonis et Aristotelis* and Bessarion's answer, *In calumniatorem platonis*. George of Trebizond (1396-c.1472) was the controversial figure who converted to Roman Catholicism in around 1426 and built a troubled career in Italy as a teacher, writer and apostolic secretary..<sup>87</sup> George saw himself as a 'prophet sent to warn the West against a revival of paganism orchestrated by a conspiracy of Platonists.'<sup>88</sup> According to his assessment, Aristotelian scholasticism was the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church while Platonism fuelled Orthodox philosophy..<sup>89</sup> To write the *Comparatio Platonis et Aristotelis* in 1458 George went back to Plato's surviving Greek texts, identifying and enumerating the philosopher's perceived sins and incompatibility with Christianity.

Cardinal Bessarion's response to George's depiction of Plato as an immoral and antichristian philosopher was his text *In calumniatorem platonis*, drafted in 1458-59. It was published in 1466 in Latin as the *Liber Defensionum Contra Obiectiones in Platonem*..<sup>90</sup> Bessarion's original contribution to the debate was in his refusal to position himself as a 'Scholastic' or supporter of Aristotle versus a 'Humanist' or supporter of Plato. He believed that the two philosophers were 'of the same substance' and 'differed only in words'..<sup>91</sup> Structured as a point by point refutation of George of Trebizond, *In*

---

<sup>86</sup> For a fascinating account of the little studied role that Scholasticism played in Bessarion's developing thought see Monfasani, *Bessarion Scholasticus*. Chapter three is particularly useful regarding his use and study of Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>87</sup> For detailed biographical information about George of Trebizond, see Monfasani's study, *George of Trebizond*. See also Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 165-92.

<sup>88</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 167.

<sup>89</sup> Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, 171.

<sup>90</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 4. A deluxe parchment copy was given to the Venetian nobleman Pietro Foscari and is now Hamilton 76 in the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin.

<sup>91</sup> *In calumniatorem platonis*, ed. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, II, 28-31, 68-71.

*calumniatorem platonis* is actually a discussion of the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>92</sup> Its success in rehabilitating Plato in the minds of more traditional scholars was the addition of a new Book Three before the final publication in 1469 which marshalled Latin scholastic sources in support of Plato's works.<sup>93</sup> The cardinal pointed out that Plato was described by St Augustine, who relied heavily on the philosopher, as 'sanctissimus'. In Book 8 of his *Works*, Augustine even claimed that Plato was aware of the Old Testament and drew on the Book of Genesis for the discussion of creation in the opening of the *Timaeus*.<sup>94</sup> This analysis and evidence seems to undermine Hankins' description of Roman scholarship as a 'bipolar world'. It appears that Bessarion found middle ground and demonstrated the merits of both philosophers – a more measured response to George of Trebizond's invective.

The text was later handed to Niccolò Perotti for editing and was re-issued under the title by which it is now known. Monfasani suggests that Bessarion all but asked his secretary to rewrite the text because he was unhappy with the quality of his Latin.<sup>95</sup> Monfasani goes on to argue in his article 'A tale of two books: Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis* and George of Trebizond's *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*' that Bessarion's text demonstrates that after all his years in Italy he was still uncomfortable in Latin and had failed to assimilate. Monfasani's conclusions about *In calumniatorem platonis* merit discussion since a counter argument might be made when other aspects of Bessarion's life and cultural patronage are taken into account.

In his article 'Bessarion Latinus' Monfasani elaborates on the assumption that since we have autograph evidence that Perotti worked on the less significant texts in Bessarion's theological corpus, he must

---

<sup>92</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 15.

<sup>93</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 5.

<sup>94</sup> Levi, 'Ficino, Augustine and the Pagans', 109.

<sup>95</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 4. See also idem, 'Still More on "Bessarion Latinus"', 217 where Monfasani asserts that the work Perotti did on the *ICP* is an assertion of his ownership and editorial control of the final text. I am not clear whether Monfasani is attributing authorship to Perotti in this assessment.

also have re-worked to a degree the more important works like *In calumniatorem platonis*.<sup>96</sup> This theory is seemingly supported by Perotti's uncompleted effort to translate all of Bessarion's oeuvre.<sup>97</sup> Monfasani has also discovered evidence that the additional book added to the final publication was based mainly on the work of one of Bessarion's familiars, the Dominican Giovanni Gatti of Messina.<sup>98</sup> Combined with the editorial work of Perotti and the possible assistance of Theodore Gaza and Giovanni Gatti, it is argued that the book was the product more of a committee than of Bessarion.<sup>99</sup> To what extent does this matter? In the eyes of the reader Bessarion was the author and the owner of the ideas.<sup>100</sup> It could be maintained that we are applying the modern value of scholarship and authorial identity to a period that did not share this concept. While Monfasani's exploration into the genesis of the book is valuable, the work could be approached from another perspective. Bessarion was sufficiently sensitive to his Latin environment to recognise that an argument about the merits of a Greek philosopher would be immeasurably enhanced by the weight of Latin authorities such as Aquinas, expressed in the elegant language for which Perotti was renowned.<sup>101</sup> *In calumniatorem platonis* was a flash of brilliance on the part of Bessarion, and possibly his followers, that demonstrated the depth of the cardinal's assimilation not his foreignness. By promoting Plato in Latin and using Latin sources to back up his argument, Bessarion was making one of the major contributions to a debate that raged in western scholarship in a way that would have been accessible to all westerners. To deliver his main work in this manner indicates a cultural empathy and understanding of his western environment that could be interpreted as assimilation.

---

<sup>96</sup> Monfasani, 'Bessarion Latinus', 169.

<sup>97</sup> Monfasani, 'Bessarion Latinus', 175-78.

<sup>98</sup> Monfasani, 'Giovanni Gatti of Messina: A Profile and an Unedited Text', II, 1315-38.

<sup>99</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 8. For Theodore Gaza's involvement see Labowsky, 'An Unknown Treatise by Theodore Gaza'; and Monfasani, 'Testi inediti di Bessarione e Teodoro Gaza'.

<sup>100</sup> Monfasani even states, '...behind the facade of Perotti's Latin we have Bessarion's own ideas and erudition.' Monfasani, 'Bessarion Latinus', 182.

<sup>101</sup> According to Monfasani, Bessarion himself stated that no Greek could write elegant Latin, Monfasani, 'Bessarion Latinus', 174, n. 5. In his letter to Lascaris (before 1445) Bessarion wrote, 'quemadmodum etiam nostris impossibile est aliquid equali gratia et ornatu atque Latini lingua Latina scribere quantumque vel Latini in Greca lingua profecerint. Cuius rei tum ego tum alii de nostris digni sumus testes qui Latinam ultra quam mediocriter intelligemus linguam, nil tamen quod ornate Latineque compositum sit scribere possumus'. Quoted in Bessarion, *Oratio dogmatica*, 7.2: 9.

## Bessarion and the Curia

When Bessarion settled permanently in Italy he did so in the service of the popes, and the rest of his life was defined by this relationship. His cultural patronage has never been considered through the medium of his interaction with the six popes who spanned his Roman lifetime, and the following section will seek to illustrate how crucial these men were and how completely Bessarion was assimilated to his Latin political and cultural contexts.

### *Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447)*

Impressed in 1439 by the Greek bishop's skills and his zeal for the cause of Church Union, Pope Eugenius IV offered Bessarion a pension of 300 florins which would be doubled if the Greek agreed to reside in Rome and attend the Curia.<sup>102</sup> The cardinal's transition to a western outlook was unequivocal at this point. It seems possible that on his return from Florence, Bessarion found Constantinople uncongenial due to the hostility his pro-Union stance had provoked. After Pope Eugenius decided to offer the bishop a cardinal's hat, Bessarion had few reasons to refuse and moved to Rome in 1440.

The general view is that the new cardinal was motivated by his conviction that he could promote the Union of the Churches and organise a crusade to relieve Constantinople most effectively from the West.<sup>103</sup> It is important to acknowledge that a more pressing reason might have been his desire to escape the difficult position in which he found himself in Constantinople. Bessarion was evidently an ambitious man, and the unpopularity of the Union among leading Greeks might well have hindered his political career trajectory. Interestingly, at no point between his appointment as a cardinal and the Fall of Constantinople did Bessarion act in an official capacity for the Byzantine Empire. There may have been a host of reasons for this, among them that the cardinal's diplomatic capacity was impaired by the

---

<sup>102</sup> Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence*, 49. Gill does not provide any primary source for this figure.

<sup>103</sup> Coccia, 'Vita e Opere del Bessarione', 274. See also chapter four in Coluccia, *Basilio Bessarione*, 39-62.

hostility of the Greeks. In addition, if he was aspiring to be accepted among the Italians he may not have wanted to be heavily involved in Byzantine politics.

In 1442 Bessarion received the cardinal's hat and titular church of SS Apostoli in Rome from Eugenius IV at a ceremony held in Florence's cathedral..<sup>104</sup> This appointment should be seen as crucial in giving the cardinal the tools and the obligations which would enable his patronage of the arts. SS Apostoli would become the site of his opulently decorated burial chapel, and the duties associated with his cardinalate would put Bessarion in a position to develop his scholarly interests. By becoming a cardinal, Bessarion was effectively declaring his intention to assimilate into the western, specifically Roman, environment. As Carol Richardson points out in *Reclaiming Rome*, the fifteenth century was a period of redefinition of what it was to be a cardinal, and these officials would see their autonomy reduced as they became instruments of the papacy..<sup>105</sup> Bessarion's appointment should be seen as part of this transition – since he was clearly a 'pope's man'. Pope Eugenius was liberal with his appointments, making twenty-seven new cardinals during his pontificate compared with the more modest average of a dozen made by each of his immediate predecessors and successors..<sup>106</sup> The pope was also responsible for changing the character of the cardinalate by appointing a host of foreigners for the political purpose of advancing his cause at the Council of Basel..<sup>107</sup> These appointments were evidently a bid by the pope to dilute the factionalism and hostility he faced from the existing body of cardinals. In this context, by accepting the cardinal's hat, Bessarion was declaring his support for this agenda, and the process of his assimilation was begun. Eugenius IV can be seen to be simultaneously acknowledging Bessarion's political support at the Council of Florence and buying his future

---

<sup>104</sup> Vast, *Le Cardinal Bessarion*, 158; Coccia, 'Vita e Opere del Bessarione', 274.

<sup>105</sup> Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome*, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica*, II, 7–16; Burkle-Young, *Passing the Keys*, xxiv; Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome*, 81.

<sup>107</sup> The Council of Basel is discussed in the section above on the Council of Florence.



loyalty...<sup>108</sup> This loyalty to the pope would feature prominently in the rest of Bessarion's career, and it is this, above all, which defines his strategies and obligations.

It is significant that the cardinal never seems to have played a part in the power struggles that raged during the fifteenth century between the pope and the college of cardinals, although Bessarion collected the writings of the key figures such as Jean Gerson, suggesting that he had an academic interest in the controversy...<sup>109</sup> John Monfasani has demonstrated that as a cardinal he showed an interest in Latin ecclesiastical controversies such as the fourteenth-century issue over apostolic poverty (he owned treatises on the subject as well as the anti-papal *Chronica* of Nicolaus Minorita)...<sup>110</sup> Bessarion also had a collection of works related to the papal-imperial struggle and conciliarism, which included the authors Jean Gerson, Pierre d'Ailly and Benedictus of Marseille. A fellow cardinal, Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo addressed his refutation of conciliarism, *De Remediis Afflictae*, to Bessarion. The cardinal's appointment clearly reflects Pope Eugenius' strategy to consolidate and enhance his authority by creating a coterie of highly placed supporters, like Bessarion, who were not part of the conciliar controversy and whose loyalty could be relied upon.

#### *Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455)*

In 1450 Cardinal Bessarion was appointed papal legate to Bologna by Nicholas V. The significance of the Bolognese appointment to the emergence of Bessarion's cultural identity is twofold. Firstly, the pope was investing a tremendous degree of trust in the cardinal by bestowing the legateship of the second most important papal city on him. This indicated that after ten years in Rome Bessarion was

---

<sup>108</sup> Chacon, *Vitae, et res gestae*, II, cols 900–19; Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome*, 81.

<sup>109</sup> A guide to the major issues of Conciliarism, along with full bibliography, can be found in Helmrath, *Das Basler Konzil*. Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition* summarizes a generation of research on the conciliar movement. See also Crowder, *Unity, Heresy and Reform*; Black, *Council and Commune*. For Bessarion's book collection of texts relating to the conciliar struggle see Monfasani, *Bessarion Scholasticus*, 55.

<sup>110</sup> Monfasani, *Bessarion Scholasticus*, 55. The relevant manuscripts are: Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.142; Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.196.

deemed to have the political acumen to handle such a volatile situation and that he had established himself as a loyal papal man. The appointment in Bologna should be seen as indicative of the degree to which the cardinal had identified himself with papal Rome and its needs.

Bologna was the most important city-state in the Papal States to the papacy: it was richer and more populous than Perugia and possibly even than Rome.<sup>111</sup> However, throughout the fifteenth century Bologna had been in a state of rebellion.<sup>112</sup> Nicholas V found the conditions were favourable in the 1450s to establish better control through a mutually agreeable arrangement between the papacy and the state.<sup>113</sup> The pope issued a series of Capitulations in August 1447 which covered issues such as finances, governing bodies, justice and papal pardons for crimes of lèse-majesté. In this delicate situation Bessarion was inserted as the papal legate. Although the city, *contado* and diocese had sworn loyalty to the pope, Cardinal Bessarion's important role was to maintain the Roman policy of collaborating with the existing dominant faction – the Bentivoglio family and to promote their control of the city and the *contado*.<sup>114</sup> By doing so the rival clan, the Canetoli, was all but exiled to the surrounding countryside where its members provided power hungry Italian princes with a source of disgruntled manpower willing to destabilize Bologna.<sup>115</sup> Disturbances were frequent throughout Bessarion's tenure.<sup>116</sup>

The second implication of the Bolognese appointment lies in the opportunity it gave the cardinal to become even more engaged in Italian intellectual life. During the five years that Bessarion spent in the

---

<sup>111</sup> Partner, *The Papal State under Martin V*, 179.

<sup>112</sup> For a history of the relations between the pope and Bologna during the fifteenth century see Partner, *The Papal State under Martin V*. Ian Robertson's book *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter* focuses on Paul II and Bologna but contains useful information about the situation under Nicholas V in the 1450s.

<sup>113</sup> De Benedictis, *Repubblica per contratto*, 107. for a useful summary of the situation facing Nicholas V in 1450.

<sup>114</sup> Nasalli Rocca di Corneliano, 'Il Card. Bessarione: Legato Pontificio in Bologna', 17-80; Robertson, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter*, 13.

<sup>115</sup> These lords included those of Carpi and Coreggio, Borso d'Este of Modena and Ferrara, as well as Filippo Maria Visconti, the duke of Milan. Robertson, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter*, 27.

<sup>116</sup> See Sorbelli, *Corpus Chronicorum Bononiensium*, IV, 164-66, 173-35; Ghirardacci, *Della Historia di Bologna*, III, 130-37.

university town he had access to texts, scribes and illuminators; and he developed a taste for Latin books which would shape half of his famous library.<sup>117</sup> The university was a source of particular interest to the cardinal and it received his much needed attention. In 1450 the institution was in a dire state with decaying buildings, irregular payment of stipends, and high taxes imposed on the degrees. Franco Bacchelli describes in his article how students were leaving in droves for other universities or studying at Bologna and then going to Padua or Pavia to receive a less expensive degree.<sup>118</sup> Bessarion immediately took action and obtained a bull from the pope on 25 July 1450 which included several stabilizing measures. The number and nature of literature graduates were to be fixed. Financial help would be obtained from the Bolognese merchants by establishing a quota of the *dazi* tax to be paid to the university. Buildings were to be restored. The cardinal was unable to rescind the hefty tax on the *laurea* (degree), but he compensated for this by subsidizing poor and deserving students from his own pocket,<sup>119</sup> as Bartolomeo Platina described in his panegyric to Bessarion:

[Bessarion] reformed and renovated the decaying ancient University which was practically neglected by the wars and the civil sedition. He gave it new buildings, provided new statutes and salaries, engaged at any price the best teachers of certain sciences. But principally he continuously encouraged the young men to study, instilling in some the hope of prizes and honours; and for the others who could not finish studying because of their poverty, he helped them with his munificence and generosity.<sup>120</sup>

The cardinal was actively involved in university life and became personally familiar with the scholars. He engaged both the humanist Niccolò Volpi and his own secretary Niccolò Perotti to teach rhetoric.

<sup>117</sup> This will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 4 of the current dissertation.

<sup>118</sup> Bacchelli, 'La legazione del cardinale Bessarione (1450-1455)', 143.

<sup>119</sup> Bacchelli, 'La legazione del cardinale Bessarione (1450-1455)', 143.

<sup>120</sup> [Bessarione] riformò e rinnovò quell'antichissima Università decaduta e quasi venuta meno per le guerre e le sedizioni civili, la dotò di nuovi edifizii, provvedendo nuovi statuti e salari, ingaggiò e qualsiasi prezzo i migliori dottori di certe scienze. Ma principalmente esortò continuamente i giovani agli studi, insinuando ad alcuni la speranza di premi ed onori; altri, che per la loro povertà non avrebbero potuto finire di studiare, li aiutò con la sua munificenza e liberalità.' Platina in *Da Platinae, Panegyricus in laudem amplissimi patris Bessarionis Episcopi Sabini, Cardinalis Nicaeni, et Patriarchae Constantinopolitani*, in *Historia B. Platinae de vitis pontificum Romanorum...alia quoque ipsius Platinae opuscula*, II (1568), 80. Translated by Laura Bolick.

And in 1451 the first school of mathematics and astronomy in Italy was established at Bologna with the approval of Bessarion, whose education at the hands of Pletho had generated a deep interest in these sciences...<sup>121</sup>

### *The Bid for the Tiara and Pope Calixtus III (1455-1458)*

In 1455 Bessarion was at the centre of a drama of great significance for the cardinal's career, even though it is usually given scant mention by historians..<sup>122</sup> Nicholas V died during the night of 24 March, and the conclave to elect a new pope began on 4 April. The Colonna and Orsini factions fielded candidates, and they began a campaign to win support. Their efforts were counterproductive and generated a desire for a neutral appointment..<sup>123</sup> Bessarion seemed to be a potential fit for this and according to Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini came very close to being elected:

After they had been polled twice, without result, a group of cardinals conferred outside the place of scrutiny and decided to elect Bessarion, the cardinal of Nicea, because he seemed the man best suited for political leadership. A sufficient number were ready to agree on him and there seemed no doubt that at the next scrutiny he would be chosen by a two-thirds vote; indeed, petitions were already being addressed to him..<sup>124</sup>

This was an important acknowledgement of the cardinal's assimilation into the Roman Catholic Church and the politics of Rome. Bessarion represented continuity with the papacy of Nicholas V: he

---

<sup>121</sup> Bacchelli, 'La legazione del cardinale Bessarione (1450-1455)', 143.

<sup>122</sup> This incident in Bessarion's career is very poorly documented and, aside from its brief treatment by Piccolomini, I have not had access to any other sources regarding it. My intention in including the cardinal's papal candidacy is to demonstrate that he was sufficiently assimilated to be considered a serious contender to lead the entire Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>123</sup> Pastor, *History of the Popes*, II, 320-22.

<sup>124</sup> Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book I, 28: 4-5: 'Scrutinioque semel atque iterum in cassum peracto, collocuti sunt inter se aliqui extra locum scrutinii, Bessarionemque cardinalem Nicenum eligere decrevunt, quod is omnium aptior ad rem publicam gubernandam videretur; conveniebatque numerus in eum sufficiens, nec dubium videbatur quin sequenti scrutinio pontifex a duabus partibus eligeretur; iamque ad eum supplicationes deferebantur.' Trans. Florence Alden Gragg.

was preoccupied with organising a crusade, and he mirrored the deceased pope's cultural and humanistic agenda. His appointment in Bologna had demonstrated his aptitude for politics and his loyalty to the interests of the papal state. It was probably the time in Bologna, away from Rome, that had removed Bessarion from the factional divisions in the city. His neutrality raised him above the Colonna and Orsini candidates.

So why was this certain victory not realised in the end? Piccolomini ascribed Bessarion's failure to the malign input of the cardinal of Avignon, Alain de Coetivy, who apparently objected to Bessarion's Greek background and questioned the sincerity of his conversion to Roman Catholicism.<sup>125</sup> In his place the elderly Spaniard, Alfonso de Borgia was elected and became Pope Calixtus III (d. 1458).<sup>126</sup> It could be speculated that there must have been other factors involved in this outcome as Bessarion's Greek origins had never been disguised, and the electors must not have initially considered this to be a problem. Unfortunately the evidence is not sufficient to reveal these other issues. It might be tentatively suggested, however, that if there was indeed any hostility towards him due to his background, Bessarion understood the implications and worked even harder throughout the rest of his career to prove that he was a man of the Latin Church. The death of Calixtus III and the accession of Pius II gave him an opportunity to achieve this.

#### *Pope Pius II (1458-1464)*

Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, known later as Pope Pius II and Cardinal Bessarion had established contact that reached back to Pius's days as a papal secretary and scholar.<sup>127</sup> It was perhaps at this point

---

<sup>125</sup> Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book I, 28: 5-6. It should be borne in mind that he and Coetivy were hostile towards each other.

<sup>126</sup> Pastor, *History of the Popes*, II, 325.

<sup>127</sup> A useful survey of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini's career can be found in the introduction to Izbicki, Christianson and Krey (eds), *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius*, 3-57. He was the subject of a biography by Voigt, *Enea Silvio de' Piccolomini* in the nineteenth century. In the same period Pius' career was covered by Weiss in *Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini* and by Creighton in *Historical Essays and Reviews*, 55-206.

more than at any other time that Bessarion's personal goals were in harmony with the papal aspirations, which he served. This relationship was deepened during Pius' pontificate by their mutual preoccupation with a crusade against the Ottomans. Constantinople had fallen in 1453, and Bessarion had become devoted to mustering a western military force to defeat the Ottoman Turks before they overran all of Christendom. His sense that Ottoman occupation of Byzantium would effect the loss of Ancient Greek culture drove him to intensify his efforts to preserve the literature that he believed was threatened. Evidence for this can be found in some of his correspondence. In a letter to his friend and agent, the Greek exile Michael Apostolis, Bessarion wrote:

As long as the common and single hearths of the Greeks remained standing, I did not concern myself with [gathering manuscripts] because I knew that they were to be found there. But when, alas, it fell, I conceived a great desire to acquire all these works, not so much for myself, who possess enough for my own use, but for the sake of the Greeks who are left now as well as those who may have better fortune in the future, for many things may happen in the course of the years. Thus the Greeks may be able to find intact and preserved in a safe place all the records of their language which remain up to now and, finding these, may be able to multiply them, without being left completely mute. Otherwise they would lose even these few vestiges of these excellent and divine men – which have been saved from what we have lost in the past – and they would differ in no way from the barbarians and slaves.<sup>128</sup>

It is argued in this thesis that this compulsion to salvage a tradition was not dictated only by an urge to save Byzantium for the Greeks, but also to preserve the creative life of Byzantium for the consumption of the West. Despite his rhetoric about the plight of Constantinople,<sup>129</sup> it is possible to propose that

---

<sup>128</sup> Letter from Bessarion to Michael Apostolis, quoted and trans. in Harris, *Greek Emigres in the West 1400-1520*, 126-28. The Greek text of the letter is printed in Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 478-9.

<sup>129</sup> For example, Bessarion wrote to Doge Francesco Foscari that, 'The public treasure has been consumed, private wealth has been destroyed, the temples have been stripped of gold, silver, jewels, the relics of the saints, and other most precious ornaments. Men have been butchered like cattle, women abducted, virgins ravished, and children snatched from the arms of their parents. If any survived so great a slaughter, they have been enslaved in chains so that they might be ransomed for a price, or subjected to every kind of torture, or reduced to the most

there was a grander primary motive for Bessarion's call for a crusade: the salvation of the Christian religion. This was a more global agenda than that of simply saving the Byzantine Empire. The cardinal highlighted over and over again the danger posed by the Ottomans to all of Christendom. This was the refrain of Pope Pius too, and it represents the key to understanding Bessarion's sense of urgency.

Writing to the Venetian doge, Francesco Foscari, Bessarion argued that:

But if he [Mehmed II] should learn that, with our own hostilities resolved, united and harmonious as Christian princes should be, we would rise up to defend the Christian religion, believe me, he would not only refrain from invading foreign lands, but would withdraw to that place within his own territories which is the most favourable for defence..<sup>130</sup>

On a wider scale the efforts to launch a crusade met with reluctance and, to some degree, indifference. The crusading popes searched in vain for a European prince to lead the military campaign or to commit substantially to it on a financial level. It is clear that the cardinal played a significant role in this papal agenda and by doing so was able to advance his cause while at the same time enhancing his status in the eyes of the pope. Pius II sent Bessarion to attend the diets in 1460 of Germany and Austria to try to elicit support for the papal crusade, but the missions were failures from a political perspective.

Bessarion was faced with the rise of the nation-state and the preoccupation of western leaders to defend or expand their borders, which were given a much higher priority than the rather more abstract defence of Christendom..<sup>131</sup>

---

humiliating servitude, The sanctuaries and shrines of the saints have been defiled by curses, scourging, bloodshed, and all kinds of shameful acts. They have made camps of the churches of God and have exposed the sacred things of God in their camps.' Letter printed in Ross and McLaughlin (eds), *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, 71.

<sup>130</sup> Letter from Bessarion to Doge Francesco Foscari, printed and trans., in Ross and McLaughlin (eds), *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, 73.

<sup>131</sup> Hankins, 'Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II', 113; Meserve, 'Italian Humanists and the Problem of the Crusade', 13.

In his role as ambassador, Bessarion did not miss the opportunity to develop his cultural patronage. It is at this point that it becomes clear that the cardinal was not only engaging with Italian scholarship, but had a wider western perspective. In Vienna in May 1460 the cardinal met Johannes Müller or Regiomontanus (1436-76), a scientist who would become known to historians as the Father of Astronomy..<sup>132</sup> Bessarion took Regiomontanus under his wing, and in September 1461 brought him back to Rome where he stayed until 1467..<sup>133</sup> Bessarion gave the astronomer access to his manuscript of Ptolemy's *Almagest* – this was the most uncorrupted version available at the time – so that he could produce a commentary. <sup>134</sup> In return for Bessarion's support Regiomontanus made a revolutionary astrolabe for the cardinal, inscribed 'Under the protection of the divine Bessarion, called Cardinal, I arise in Rome as the work of Joannis, 1462.' <sup>135</sup> In addition Regiomontanus dedicated his *Epytoma Almagesti, De compositione et usu cuiusdam meteoroscopi*, and *De triangulis* to Bessarion. In 1465 he wrote a treatise for the cardinal on an armillary sphere called *Meteorosopium*..<sup>136</sup> Regiomontanus' work led the revival of astronomy in Europe, and Bessarion played a significant role, launching the astronomer who returned to Germany where he set up his own printing press and made scientific instruments.

In April 1462 Bessarion was involved in an event that demonstrated the degree to which the cardinal put the interests of Rome above those of his native Greek land: the translation of St Andrew's head from Morea to Rome. Bessarion's role in this event was significant and it has been overlooked that this incident demonstrates one of those occasions when his links with Greece were harnessed by the papal machinery to further its interests. The main source for this event is Pius II's *Commentaries*, where the pope recorded that the cardinal was instrumental in the negotiations with Thomas Palaeologus for the surrender of the head, and that Bessarion delivered an impassioned speech in a shaking voice and with

---

<sup>132</sup> De Price, 'The First Scientific Instrument of the Renaissance', 26.

<sup>133</sup> King, 'The Astrolabe Presented by Regiomontanus to Cardinal Bessarion in 1462' 168.

<sup>134</sup> King, 'The Astrolabe Presented by Regiomontanus to Cardinal Bessarion in 1462', 167.

<sup>135</sup> 'SVB DIVI BESSARIONIS/CARDINE DICTI PRAESI/DIO ROMAE SVRGO 10/ANNIS OPUS: 1462', De Price, 'The First Scientific Instrument of the Renaissance', 27-28.

<sup>136</sup> De Price, 'The First Scientific Instrument of the Renaissance', 28.



tears at St Peter's at the end of the procession. Evidently in response to Bessarion's emotion, the pope asked in his *Commentaries*,

who is there who is not stirred to the depth of his being, whose inmost heart is not on fire?

Who does not weep for joy...We rejoice, we shout, we exult in jubilation at thy coming, most divine Apostle Andrew...<sup>137</sup>

The sacred Byzantine relic of the head of the Apostle St Andrew lay in Patras in the despotate of Morea, and Despot Thomas rescued it and took it to Corfu into exile with his family after Mehmed II's troops invaded and captured his territory in 1460.<sup>138</sup> Bessarion championed Thomas Palaeologus, praising his effort to resist the Ottoman Turks as, 'a great and wonderful and miraculous thing it was and is, and one which gives us hope of great things for the future, provided we know how to use this opportunity well.'<sup>139</sup>

Pope Pius II asked the despot to bring the head to Rome in return for sanctuary for him and his family so that the relic could rest by the bones of St Peter.<sup>140</sup> On one hand Bessarion was endeavouring to secure the safety of a piece of Byzantine heritage, but on the other he was evidently endorsing a statement of Roman supremacy over the Greek Church.<sup>141</sup> By offering St Andrew's head a safe haven, entombed next to the body of St Peter, the pope was laying claim to the first apostle and reuniting him with his brother under Roman protection. Bessarion's prominent involvement was a clear statement of support for this act. Connected to this was the message of unification that the acquisition symbolised. Bringing together the patriarchs of the West and the East was a powerful expression of the unity that

---

<sup>137</sup> Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book VIII, 528. Trans. Florence Alden Gragg.

<sup>138</sup> For Thomas Palaeologus' final years see Runciman, *Fall of Constantinople*, 182-84 and Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 228-30.

<sup>139</sup> Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 210. On 2 June 1459 Pius II wrote to the European princes notifying them that Morea was revolting against the Turks, *Arch. Segr. Vaticano*, Arm. XXXIX, tom. 9, f. 41. Cited and trans. in Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 210, n. 37.

<sup>140</sup> Rubinstein, 'Pius II's Piazza S. Pietro and St Andrew's Head', 22.

<sup>141</sup> For the origins of the supremacy debate between Rome and Constantinople see p. 16 above.

Bessarion had wanted to establish between the Churches since the Council of Florence. The cardinal was the figurative intermediary of this union, physically receiving the gift from Byzantium and handing it over to the recipient in the West.

Thomas arrived at Ancona on 7 March 1460 and reached Rome a year later but would not surrender the head to Roman hands until the civil unrest in the city was brought under control.<sup>142</sup> It was not until Palm Sunday in 1462 (12 April) that Pius received the relic from the weeping Cardinal Bessarion on a wooden tribune erected for the ceremony in the meadows near Ponte Molle (the Milvian bridge).<sup>143</sup> A chapel to St Andrew was erected in the cemetery of the Pellegrini near the bridge, and an inscription recorded the event that was to become one of the defining moments of Pius' pontificate. The inscription reads:

Pius II, Pontifex Maximus, received in these fields the sacred head of the blessed apostle Andrew, carried from the Peleponnesus and carried it in his hands into the city in the year 1462 on the holy day Monday, 12 April. On account of this he erected this monument and with all the faithful in Christ who visited this same place on the festival and who implored the intercession of St Andrew on five occasions having worshiped the Lord Christ for the salvation of the community of the faithful, he granted the full remission of all sins ...<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> Rubinstein, 'Pius II's Piazza S. Pietro and St Andrew's Head', 22; Antoniutti (ed), *Pio II e Sant'Andrea Apostolo*, 18-20. In his *Commentaries*, Pius claimed that it was his decision to wait until the unrest had settled: 'Several months later when the Pope's campaign had succeeded... when all other foes in terror had either surrendered or fled far away; when peace was restored in the territory of Rome and the people around about were enjoying security and rest...the pope decided to send for the sacred head.' Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book VIII, 525.

<sup>143</sup> Rubinstein, 'Pius II's Piazza S. Pietro and St Andrew's Head', 30; Antoniutti (ed), *Pio II e Sant'Andrea Apostolo*, 21.

<sup>144</sup> 'Pius II. Pont. Max. sacrum beati apostoli Andree caput ex Peloponneso advectum his in pratis excepit et suis manibus portavit in urbem anno salutis MCCCCLXII pridie Idus Aprilis que tunc fuit secunda feria [Monday] maioris hebdomade atque idcirco hunc titulum erexit et universis Christi fidelibus qui eadem feria imposterum hunc locum visitaverint et quinquies Christo Domino adorato intercessionem Sancti Andree pro communi fidelium salute imploraverint plenariam omnium peccatorum in forma ecclesie consueta perpetuo duraturam indulisit remissionem anno pontificatus sui quarto.' The text of the inscription can be found in Vincenzo Forcella, *Iscrizioni delle chiese e d'altri edifici di Roma dal secolo XI fino ai giorni nostri*, 14 vols, 1869-84, XII, pt. xxiii, no. 245, 213. Quoted in Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, 228, n. 102. Translated Laura Bolick.

The pope and the head spent the night at Santa Maria del Popolo where the head was placed before the miraculous Madonna del Popolo, an icon of the Madonna said to be by the hand of St Luke..<sup>145</sup> A threatening storm cleared by the morning thanks to the supposed intervention of St Andrew, offering a good omen to the ecstatic crowds..<sup>146</sup> The pope and his cardinals completed the two-mile procession through Rome to St Peter's on the same day. It was a carefully choreographed display. The fountains flowed with wine and people dressed themselves as angels and played music along the route of the parade. Incense and other fragrant bushes burned on every corner..<sup>147</sup>

First and foremost, possession of St Andrew's head was perceived as a talisman in the fight against the Ottomans. It is evident that after the failure of Council of Mantua in 1459, Pius and Bessarion seized the opportunity to keep the crusade agenda alive. With the help of the relics of Saints Paul, Peter and Andrew, Rome and western Christendom would be defended against the Ottoman Turks. The acquisition was carefully announced by the pope as a loan for safekeeping until the inevitable defeat of the Muslims would enable the secure return of the head to its Byzantine home: 'God willing thou shalt be restored to thy throne with glory...Meanwhile thou shalt tarry a space with thy brother and shalt enjoy like honour with him.'<sup>148</sup> In addition, the ceremonial reception of the relic was designed to impress and inspire the European princes whom Pius and Bessarion were struggling so hard to persuade to commit to a crusade..<sup>149</sup>

The acquisition of the relic and the ceremony organised to welcome it embodied more subtle messages than the dialogue between the Byzantine and Latin worlds, and Bessarion's contribution made him one of the messengers. Such a great event was an opportunity to rally a city behind the papacy through the

---

<sup>145</sup> Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book VIII, 530.

<sup>146</sup> Rubinstein, 'Pius II's Piazza S. Pietro and St Andrew's Head', 30; Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book VIII, 526.

<sup>147</sup> Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book VIII, 535.

<sup>148</sup> Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book VIII, 527.

<sup>149</sup> Rubinstein, 'Pius II's Piazza S. Pietro and St Andrew's Head', 29; D'Ascia, *Il Corano e la tiara*, 99.

vehicle of a demonstration of papal piety – the tears, the humility and the emotional speeches. With the acquisition of this relic, Pius was endowing Rome with more holiness and thus enhancing his reputation as the pope accountable for this enhanced state of piety. It was Bessarion who had been responsible for acquiring the tool to effect this. The words of the hymn sung at the tribune in the meadow near Ponte Molle reveal the propaganda value of the exercise,

He [St Andrew] was the first to follow Jesus' call; he first like him endured the cross, a martyr revered forever on the shores of Greece. But when the Ottomans were conquering the Greeks, that he might not fall prey to ravening hounds, Pius II carried him away and received the exile into the holy city. The pope himself came to meet him with the holy senate... the people chant 'Be thou, we pray, the prop, the father of our fostering city. O thou great champion of the holy Faith, first to hear the Lord's summons...protect Rome....Sharpen Thy three-forked bolt against the Ottoman Turks.'<sup>150</sup>

The head of St Andrew was also a reason for Pius to make a visual statement of his papal authority in the form of a building campaign that he initiated to make Rome worthy of the relic. Bessarion supported this sovereignty, and his role in the choreographing of the ceremony linked with the reception of the relic, demonstrated his loyalty to the pope. The major artistic commissions.<sup>151</sup> that Pius launched to celebrate the relic indicate how important an event this was to the pope and, by extension, how important Bessarion was in the Curia to have played such a prominent role.

Pope Pius was identified with the relic of St Andrew and the meaning that he embodied for Rome to such an extent that the pope's burial monument commemorates the translation of the apostle's head. The marble relief on Pius' tomb, which is now in S. Andrea delle Valle, Rome and was commissioned

---

<sup>150</sup> Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book VIII, 529. Trans. Florence Alden Gragg.

<sup>151</sup> Paolo Romano, Isaia da Pisa and Simone da Firenze were all given major sculptural commissions for this papal project. Rubinstein, 'Pius II's Piazza S. Pietro and St Andrew's Head', 24.

by his nephew Cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini (later Pope Pius III), depicts the events of Easter 1462 in low relief (Figure 1). In the foreground Bessarion is depicted handing the head on a platter to the pope. The inclusion of the cardinal on the papal tomb must be seen as an important tribute to the status of the cardinal in the eyes of the pope. This was a fitting visual climax to the papal imperial pretensions and to the statement of piety engineered by Pius and Bessarion through this event.

A year later Bessarion and the pope focused on Venice as the critical player in the potential success of a crusade..<sup>152</sup> Pius II sent Bessarion to Venice as papal legate on 22 July 1463. It is evident that the pope and the cardinal were working together closely to achieve their goals – this was an immensely important commission and it demonstrated the degree to which Bessarion was entrusted as a tool of the pope. The cardinal was very aware that the Venetians had an established network of bases in the former Byzantine territories from which military operations could be launched. Their vast naval capability would be vital in the crusade, and their mercantile activities meant that they had the resources to fund such an operation. Bessarion faced the challenge that the Republic was rather ambivalent towards the Ottoman threat and was inclined to adopt a pragmatic view, believing that in some ways that the good will of the Sultan was more important than that of the Byzantine cause..<sup>153</sup> The cardinal stayed in the city for a year, participating in elections, following diplomatic and political events and building relationships to encourage a Venetian contribution to the crusade..<sup>154</sup> Shortly after his arrival, Bessarion delivered an impassioned speech to the Senate regarding the necessary intervention against the Ottoman Turks. Despite their prevarications, the government finally agreed to go to war on 29 July 1463, initiating a conflict that would last until 1479 and end in Venice losing her dominance in the Aegean. During his year in the Republic the cardinal participated in the intellectual life of the state, studying at the monastery of S. Giorgio Maggiore and taking Venetian scholars, such

---

<sup>152</sup> Venetian reluctance to commit the Republic to a war with the Turks is examined closely in Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*.

<sup>153</sup> Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 414.

<sup>154</sup> Zorzi, 'Bessarione e Venezia', 205.

as Niccolò Segundino and Giacomo Perleone, under his protection...<sup>155</sup> He also donated a Byzantine reliquary to the Venetian confraternity of the Scuola di S. Maria dei Battuti della Carità, a significant gesture towards the religious community in the Republic...<sup>156</sup>

In the meantime Pius II had deployed Bessarion's Greekness to effect once again when he appointed him as commendatory abbot of the Basilian Abbey of Grottaferrata outside Rome in 1462, a position the cardinal held until his death in 1472. The abbey had been founded in 1004 by Byzantine monks from Calabria led by St Nilus of Rossano, and his disciple St Bartolomeo achieved the consecration of the monastery's church in 1024...<sup>157</sup> The monks were members of the Congregazione d'Italia dei Monaci Basiliani (which had been established to bring Byzantine monks within the control of the Italian Church). In her introduction to a study of the movement of Basilian monks to Albania, the historian Ines Angjeli Murzaku writes that the Order, 'has always been united to the See of Rome, nonetheless maintaining and preserving the Byzantine-Studite liturgical tradition'...<sup>158</sup> They never effected a 'rottura', the official act of breaking from the Orthodox Church, and there are no sources to suggest that the Basilian monks had any Uniate agenda. Bessarion's role at Grottaferrata seems to have been reformatory, and this appointment raises interesting questions about his motivations and the direction of that reform agenda. This is a good example of the cardinal's perspective on the Greek Church through a Latin filter...<sup>159</sup> The scholar Maria Theresa Caciorgna has discussed Bessarion's relationship with Grottaferrata in her edited volume, *Santa Maria di Grottaferrata e il Cardinale Bessarione: Fonte e Studi sulla Prima Commenda*, concluding that he used the monastery as a tool for

---

<sup>155</sup> Zorzi, 'Bessarione e Venezia', 205.

<sup>156</sup> This reliquary is discussed in depth in the chapter on Icons and Reliquaries (Chapter 3) in the present dissertation.

<sup>157</sup> For St Nilus and Grottaferrata see G. Giovanelli (ed), *S. Nilo di Rossano fondatore e patrono di Grottaferrata*, Grottaferrata 1966; and E. Fabricatore (ed), *San Nilo, il monastero italo-bizantino di Grottaferrata*, Rome 2005. *L'Abbazia Greca di Grottaferrata*, 15. Details of the church building campaign comes from the guidebook with its useful bibliography at 70-71. See specifically, T. Sciommarì, *Note ed osservazioni storiche spettanti all'insigne basilica di Grottaferrata ed alla vite che si propone di S. Bartolomeo IV abate*, Rome 1728 and; G. Giovanelli, *Vita di S. Bartolomeo Juniore IV Egumeno e Confondatore di Grottaferrata*, Grottaferrata 1962.

<sup>158</sup> Murzaku, 'Between East and West: The Basilian Monks of Grottaferrata in Albania', 103.

<sup>159</sup> Bianca, 'L'Abbazia di Grottaferrata', 140.

preserving Greek culture in Italy..<sup>160</sup> According to Caciorgna, Bessarion's effort to compose a book of rules in the Greek language based on the ascetic practices of St Basil is evidence that he was trying to revive Greek and Byzantine spirituality. This book formed the basis of life at Grottaferrata until 1579..<sup>161</sup> However when Bessarion's actions are examined closely, it seems that the cardinal's agenda was more focused on weeding out the decadence which he had identified in the institution and that the reintroduction of the rules of St Basil was more an effort to restore discipline in the Order than an exercise in cultural identification. This alternative interpretation of Bessarion's approach is reinforced by considering the implementation of the Greek Rules in the context of the other changes that Bessarion instituted. Taken together, the situation looks more complicated, and it becomes possible to question Caciorgna's conclusion that the cardinal was championing the Greek way over the Roman.

It is arguable that, although preoccupied with making sure that the monks were competent in the Greek language, Bessarion demonstrated his affinity with the western practices by making the Basilians adopt the Latin round form of the host in place of the Greek square shape. He eliminated the traditional Orthodox use of unleavened bread in the Communion, a point of some controversy whenever the Latin and Orthodox Churches attempted to find common ground. It was Bessarion who introduced the Latin practice of elevating the host in the Holy Communion at Grottaferrata..<sup>162</sup> In addition the Greek monks were expected to adopt Latin vestments..<sup>163</sup> On balance, it seems possible to conclude that Bessarion imposed more reforms to make the monastery conform to the Roman Catholic traditions than to the Greek Orthodox.

---

<sup>160</sup> Pera, 'La Platea del Bessarione', 41.

<sup>161</sup> Pera, 'La Platea del Bessarione', 43.

<sup>162</sup> Rocchi, *La Badia di Grottaferrata*, 72.

<sup>163</sup> (No author), *Saint Bartholomew and Grottaferrata*, 51.

### *Pope Paul II (1464-1471)*

In 1464 the Venetian Cardinal Pietro Barbo was elected pope as Paul II (d. 1471). Paul's pontificate is a significant period for this thesis because Bessarion was very active as a patron during this time. We see the cardinal expressing his western identity through his cultural projects, and these required close contact with the pope. Paul's relationship with Bessarion is frequently dismissed as one of latent hostility – proof for this being demonstrated by the cardinal allegedly retreating from politics to immerse himself in his academic occupations. Rather than interpreting this change in lifestyle balance as a reaction to papal hostility, it is possible to find other explanations. Bessarion's ambassadorial schedule under Pius II had been specifically related to the pope's initiatives to fund a crusade. Pope Paul did not devote as much time or resources to this campaign as his predecessor and so the cardinal's political experience was not as useful to him. As this re-examination of both Pope Paul's reputation and Bessarion's activity during his pontificate will show, there is evidence that a different dynamic was at work between the two men.

As active patrons, Paul II and Bessarion had frequent recourse to interaction which depended on a benign relationship. It will be seen in the chapters that follow that many of the cardinal's projects took shape during the pontificate of Paul. During this period Bessarion began the decorative programme for his burial chapel, and the pope was responsible for issuing the bulls that authorised this commission..<sup>164</sup> Bessarion's book collecting continued apace, and he received papal permission to donate the collection in 1468 to Venice, Paul's native state..<sup>165</sup> The cardinal also became involved in the book printing movement in Italy during Paul's pontificate..<sup>166</sup> The texts produced by the printers who were linked to the cardinal to some degree were all dedicated to the pope. The two men also shared a compulsive interest in icons, collecting and commissioning the panels. Paul II's reign was a fruitful period for Bessarion's cultural patronage.

---

<sup>164</sup> See chapter 2 in the present dissertation.

<sup>165</sup> See chapter 4 in the present dissertation.

<sup>166</sup> See chapter 6 in the present dissertation.



The traditional assessment of the interaction between Bessarion and Paul II is founded on several assumptions. In the first instance the pope was judged to be a barbarian who endeavoured to slow down the progress of humanism and the development of Renaissance intellectual life. It is worth dwelling on the attitude of Paul II towards classical learning because it reveals that it was in reality manifestly not at odds with Bessarion's outlook. The negative account is based on Bartolomeo Platina's (1421-81) biography of the pope in his *Lives of the Popes*, in which the author condemns Paul II as 'a great enemy and despiser of human learning'.<sup>167</sup> Platina, a humanist and later the first librarian of the papal library established by Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84), had reason to undermine Paul II after spending a year in the Castel Sant'Angelo under torture as the pope's prisoner. As a leading member of a group known as the Pomponio Academy, Platina had been accused of plotting to oust Paul and restore a republic in Rome in 1468. It is argued that the reverberations of this scandal affected the relations between the pope and Bessarion because the cardinal also operated an 'academy' and was therefore tainted by association with Pomponio Laeto. However, the latter group was more extreme than Bessarion's gathering (discussed above), changing their names to Latin names and meeting in the catacombs where they were rumoured to indulge in pagan rituals.

In Platina's biography he implies that the conspiracy charges were purely a reflection of Paul's suspicion of intellectual activity. He stresses that the pope hated classical literature and those who studied it, drawing attention to Paul's alleged reluctance to use Latin for papal business and his contempt for poetry.<sup>168</sup> The aggrieved humanist's opinion seems to be confirmed by a letter that the Milanese ambassador Bianchi wrote the day after the arrest of the conspirators in which he reports:

and then his Holiness began to damn greatly these humanist studies saying that if God should grant that he should live, he would see to two things; one of which would be that it would not

---

<sup>167</sup> Platina, *Lives of the Popes*, 275-96. For the quote see p. 296.

<sup>168</sup> Palermino, 'The Roman Academy, the Catacombs and the Conspiracy of 1468', 129.

be permissible to study these vain histories and poems which are so full of heresy and evil words..<sup>169</sup>

If Pope Paul's life is examined more objectively than Platina was able to do, it becomes evident that he was not actually an enemy of culture and that the gulf between him and Bessarion was not great in terms of intellectual outlook. It is possible to assemble a catalogue of evidence that Paul had a very active curiosity and appreciation of antiquity and scholarship. Paul and Bessarion shared an interest in Roman history, and the pope rewarded and commissioned translations of Greek histories into Latin..<sup>170</sup> They both had a compulsion to preserve classical heritage. Pope Paul's efforts were manifested in his restoration of the Roman ruins in the papal city, his programme of repairs to the Pantheon, to the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in 1466, 1467 and 1468, and to the Arch of Titus in 1466..<sup>171</sup> However, Paul II was best known for his collection of cameos and engraved gems. By 1457 he owned 227 of these in his collection including portraits of Nero, Philip of Macedon, Octavian and Caligula..<sup>172</sup>

Although the pope would not be identified by the historian today as a Roman humanist, he subscribed to scholarship with a strong Venetian flavour. His training had taken place in Venice in a Venetian context. Here there was a tendency towards religious asceticism which culminated in the early 1500s with Vincenzo Querini and the blessed Paolo Giustinian..<sup>173</sup> This was not alien to Bessarion, who identified on many levels with the Republic. Venetians disapproved of what they perceived to be the more frivolous aspects of Renaissance humanism such as the revival of scurrilous ancient poetry. Their intellectual attention focused primarily on history and religious texts. The cardinal also leaned towards

---

<sup>169</sup> Quoted and trans. in Palermينو, 'The Roman Academy, the Catacombs and the Conspiracy of 1468', 129.

<sup>170</sup> Dunston, 'Pope Paul II and the Humanists', 290.

<sup>171</sup> Muntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes*, II, 89-94.

<sup>172</sup> Weiss, *Un umanista veneziano: Papa Paolo II*, 26; Muntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes*, II, 236-65.

<sup>173</sup> Weiss, *Un umanista veneziano: Papa Paolo II*, 12. See also H. Jedin, 'Vincenzo Querini und Pietro Bembo', *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, Vatican City 1946, IV, 407-24; J. Leclercq, *Un umaniste ermite – le bienheureux Paul Giustiniani*, Rome 1951; H. Jedin, 'Gasparo Contarini e il contributo veneziano alla riforma cattolica', *La Civiltà veneziana del Rinascimento*, Florence 1958, 105-24.

history and philosophy rather than literature in his academic interests. Pope Paul demonstrated his continuing interest in Venetian scholarship by issuing the bull of 1470 authorising the foundation of a university in Venice. Bessarion too had been involved in university administration in Bologna. Paul's project never materialised due to the obstacles thrown up by the Senate but the papal effort was there...<sup>174</sup>

There is little evidence of a gulf between the two men. Arguably, Bessarion had much in common with Paul II, and contrary to received opinion, this pontificate was not a period of retreat for the cardinal, but one of flowering cultural projects endorsed by the pope. In the following chapters these projects will be demonstrated to have a western character, suggesting that Bessarion was fully integrated into his Latin environment under Paul II.

#### *Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484)*

Paul II died in the night of 26 July 1471. It can be assumed that by this time Bessarion was well assimilated into his Italian environment and that he was perceived as a western man since once again he was a contender for the papal tiara, this time at the behest of Venice...<sup>175</sup> The Senate wrote to the ambassador of Federico da Montefeltro, Alvise Donato, with a request for his help in achieving the election of the cardinal...<sup>176</sup> Bessarion was evidently identified with Venetian interests, presumably because the Republic needed a pope who would be likely to financially commit to the Crusade and the protection of the state's maritime satellites. Unfortunately Bessarion was unwilling to be pressured into

---

<sup>174</sup> Dunston, 'Pope Paul II and the Humanists', 289.

<sup>175</sup> Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 312.

<sup>176</sup> Sen. Secreta, Reg. 25, fol. 49: 'Vestris litteris et ante obitum summi pontificis et post illius decessum intelleximus prudentissimas opiniones et memoraciones istius illustrissimi domini cuius exactam virtutem et rerum experientiam et in nos affectionem et devotionem maximi semper fecimus. Secum igitur receptis presentibus estote et illa gratias uberes agite nostro nomine tam de suis fidelissimis sapientissimique memoracionibus quam de liberalissimis oblationibus et de opera postremo adhibita ut pontificatus sit in reverendissimum dominum Cardinalem Nicenum, ceterorum omnium optimum et ad rerum temporumque condiciones accommodatissimum, cadat...'

offering favours to Cardinals Orisini, Borgia and Gonzaga to win votes..<sup>177</sup> This was not an issue for Francesco della Rovere, a close friend of the Greek cardinal, who was then elected as Pope Sixtus IV.

On 23 December 1471 the pope convened a Secret Consistory to appoint five cardinals as *Legates de latere*, one of whom was Bessarion..<sup>178</sup> He was to be ambassador to France, Burgundy and England in a renewed attempt to muster support for the Crusade. The historian Egmont Lee argues that the cardinal was sent on this arduous mission at his advanced age to remove him from Rome and to diffuse the hostility that had arisen between the two men over the election..<sup>179</sup> The more likely explanation was that Bessarion was the best man for this sort of project, and Sixtus was maximizing his resources. Rather than interpreting this appointment as evidence of bad feeling between the pope and his cardinal, it demonstrates the closeness and loyalty that Sixtus perceived in Bessarion. The embassy was a failure: Louis XI was too preoccupied with his conflict over Burgundy to give the cardinal any time or support, and Bessarion became so unwell that he turned back to Italy. Significantly, though, the French trip provided an opportunity to combine cultural projects with the political. Bessarion met up with Guillaume Fichet, a French editor who had been producing and promoting the cardinal's crusade propaganda work, the *Orationes*. A presentation copy was offered to King Louis and another was sent to Edward IV of England. Bessarion had been involved in the printing industry in Rome, and with the support of Fichet, his influence via the written word had reached the north..<sup>180</sup>

The ailing, elderly cardinal made it as far as Ravenna on his way back to Rome. He caught a fever there and died on 18 November 1472. A few weeks later his remains were brought to his titular church of SS Apostoli and interred in his burial chapel of S. Eugenia. Sixtus IV attended the funeral – a mark

---

<sup>177</sup> Lee, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters*, 30.

<sup>178</sup> Pastor, *History of the Popes*, IV, 219.

<sup>179</sup> Lee, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters*, 31.

<sup>180</sup> See chapter 6 of the present dissertation.

of respect not afforded to the majority of cardinals, implying that there was no conflict between the two friends, and a testament to the high profile Bessarion held in the Curia.

## **Conclusion**

A biographical survey of Cardinal Bessarion's life demonstrates a career trajectory that goes some way to explaining the nature of his cultural projects. His early experiences established the political faculties that ultimately set him before a series of popes. His relationship with them was reciprocal: he performed an effective role in the papal machinery and this role enhanced his personal status. This was especially evident in his role under Pope Pius II. This prominence in the Curia put Bessarion in a position to commission a series of cultural projects. The following chapters will discuss these in depth to demonstrate how the cardinal's evolving assimilation into Roman culture is reflected in his cultural commissions.

## Chapter 2: The Chapel of S. Eugenia in SS Apostoli, Rome

Bessarion was granted permission by Pope Pius II in 1463 to restore and decorate the Chapel of S. Eugenia as a burial chapel in the cardinal's titular church of SS Apostoli, Rome. Four years later Paul II issued a bull reconfirming the grant. This was the most important artistic commission of the cardinal's life (it was possibly his only mural programme). It is of paramount significance that Bessarion chose an Italian rather than Greek artistic vocabulary, stylistic idiom and theme for the commission. There were plenty of Byzantine artists working in Crete and Venice where the cardinal had many links. In addition Bessarion was known to have supported several Greek refugees in his 'academy' so the concept of hiring fellow countrymen to execute his cultural projects was neither foreign to Bessarion nor logistically challenging for him. Nonetheless he chose a local, western artist instead. The decorative scheme and conception of the Chapel of S. Eugenia suggests that Bessarion had, to a great extent, embraced the cultural identity of the West over that of Byzantium. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate and support this controversial view.

Through a combination of what remains intact today on the walls of the chapel and the five extant sources, it is possible to hypothesize on the original appearance of the fresco programme. The earliest of these sources includes surviving instructions from Bessarion to Antoniazio Romano. Two hundred years later, Padre Malvasia, writing in the seventeenth century, provided a description of the imagery before the chapel was bricked up to create a family chapel for the Odescalchi.<sup>1</sup> Nothing more was known about Bessarion's commission until 1959 when the architect Clemente Busiri-Vici uncovered traces of the frescoes while working on the Colonna palazzo next door to the church.<sup>2</sup> A restoration programme in 1989-90 revealed more about the nature of the frescoed scenes. Finally, the art historian Vitaliano Tiberia created a reconstruction of the programme in his book *Antoniazzo Romano per il*

---

<sup>1</sup> Malvasia, *Compendio Historico della Ven. Basilica di SS. Dodici Apostoli*.

<sup>2</sup> Busiri-Vici, 'Un ritrovamento eccezionale relativo all'antica basilica dei SS. Apostoli in Roma', 70-83.

*Cardinale Bessarione*.<sup>3</sup> Although the extensive damage and incomplete documentary evidence has hampered interpretation of the frescoes, art historians have consistently endeavoured to establish links with Bessarion's Greek background. By looking again at the extant frescoes and reassessing the documentary material on the chapel, an alternative interpretation of the iconography and the decorative scheme as a whole will be offered. If the evidence is marshalled and reconsidered, the assumption that the cardinal was presenting a visual homage to his Greekness is opened to further question.

### **Bessarion and SS Apostoli**

Bessarion's involvement with the basilica of SS Apostoli and the commission for the chapel of S. Eugenia are partially documented, providing general evidence for the role of the cardinal in this church, as well as the stages of the commission and the appearance of the chapel, but also raising questions about the iconography in particular.

The Chapel of S. Eugenia, which was founded by Pope Stephen VI (885-91),<sup>4</sup> was situated within an apse at the end of the north transept of the basilica (Figure 71). At this time the chapel housed the relics, in porphyry vessels, of SS Eugenia and Claudia as well as twelve other martyrs. The tale of St Eugenia, as told in *The Golden Legend*, has features that may have resonated with Cardinal Bessarion and may explain why he selected that particular chapel as his burial site rather than electing to be buried in somewhere more 'Greek' like Grottaferrata. Eugenia too was an avid scholar of philosophy, letters and liberal arts. Her conversion occurred when she overheard some Christians chanting that the

---

<sup>3</sup> Tiberia, *Antoniazio Romano per il Cardinale Bessarione a Roma*.

<sup>4</sup> Busiri-Vici, 'Un ritrovamento eccezionale', 72. Busiri-Vici bases this theory on two pieces of circumstantial evidence. In the ninth century there was an excess of papal wealth which was being invested in renovating and founding Roman churches and he speculates that this was a likely investment by Pope Stephen. Secondly, vaulting in Bessarion's chapel was typical of the period which began to use this architectural device instead of flat roofs.

gods of the people were demons and that there was only one God who made the earth..<sup>5</sup> She responded to her servants,

We worked our way with meticulous attention through the philosophers' syllogisms, Aristotle's arguments and Plato's ideas, the precepts of Socrates, and, to be brief, whatever the poets sang, whatever the orators or the philosophers thought; but all that is wiped out by this one sentence. A usurped authority has used words to make me your mistress, but the truth makes me your sister. Let us then be brothers, and follow Christ!<sup>6</sup>

Bessarion may have been attracted to the intellectualism of the saint and shared Eugenia's interests in Greek philosophers but, like her, believed them to be superseded by Christianity. They had a mutual experience of conversion: he from Greek Orthodox to Roman Catholic, and she from pagan to Christian.

Two features of the history of the basilica stand out as relevant to Bessarion's later involvement with SS Apostoli. The first concerns the speculation that the church was founded by the Emperor Constantine and the theory that Bessarion was appointed to this basilica because of these shared Greek roots. The only evidence that the emperor was involved in the basilica is an inscription in the entrance,<sup>7</sup> but the script is dated to the fourteenth century at the earliest, and the myth of Constantine's involvement reaches back only as far as the twelfth century..<sup>8</sup> In the mid-fifteenth century, however, Pope Eugenius and Bessarion probably had no reason to doubt the accuracy of the inscription or the founding myth of the church, and it has been argued that perhaps this Greek link was a factor in the

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Omnes Dii gentium daemonia/ Dominus autem caelos fecit.' Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, II, 165-7. Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>6</sup> Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, II, 165-67.

<sup>7</sup> 'HAEC VEN. BASILICA IN HONOREM XII APOSTOLORUM/ PRIMO A COSTANTINO FUNDITA. POSTMODUM AB HAERETICIS FUIT DESTRUCTA/ PELAGIUS ET IOHANNES SUMMI PONTIFICIES IN GRADUM PRISTINUM RESTAURANTES/ MULTORUM SANCTORUM CORPORIBUS ET INDULGENTIIS EXORNAVERUNT'.

<sup>8</sup> Buchowiecki, *Handbuch der Kirchen Roms*, 640.



choice of titular church for the cardinal. The more likely explanation may lie in the church's need for Bessarion's demonstrable skills in administrative reform (discussed below).

A second important historical stage for understanding Bessarion's relationship to SS Apostoli involved the Colonna pope, Martin V (1417-31), who found it in a state of disrepair and began renovations in 1424.<sup>9</sup> The extent of the restoration is refuted by Richard Krautheimer who points out that the text in the *Liber Pontificalis* describes Pope Martin's work on the palace, the main residence of the Colonna family in Rome, not the basilica.<sup>10</sup> However, Bartolomeo Platina's *Life of Pope Martin*, written in the late fifteenth century, refers explicitly to Martin's renovation work on the church, and to a papal medal of 1417 which shows the earliest depiction of the new facade, consisting of seven arches above piers with half columns.<sup>11</sup> The later transfer of the church and palazzo from the Colonna family to the new cardinal was a significant statement by Pope Eugenius IV who was appointing Bessarion as a papal man and not as a factional local Roman. As discussed in Chapter 1, the cardinal's loyalty to the Curia was crucial to the development of his career.

The bull which Eugenius IV issued in 1443 granting SS Apostoli to Bessarion as his titular church, expressed reservations about the administrative efficiency of the basilica and the discipline of the canons. By this appointment, the pope was demonstrating the faith which he had in the cardinal to carry out the reforms that would make the church more financially viable and better administered. It is worth dwelling on Bessarion's role in the administration and reform of the church as a means of understanding the close relationship he developed with the basilica and why he might have been inclined to choose it as the site for his burial chapel over somewhere like Venice or Grottaferrata. Volterrano, the cardinal's pronotary, recorded these reforms in his pamphlet describing the history of

---

<sup>9</sup> Busiri-Vici, 'Un ritrovamento eccezionale', 72.

<sup>10</sup> Krautheimer, *Corpus Basilicarum*, I, 79.

<sup>11</sup> Buchowiecki, *Handbuch der Kirchen Roms*, 643.

SS Apostoli, written in 1454. Volterrano mentioned Bessarion's disapproval of the state of affairs among the basilica's canons, speaking of how their 'violent' desires and 'poisonous' appetites were distracting them to commit evil acts. He complained of their perverse abuses and of the corruption running rife in the institution.<sup>12</sup> Bessarion proposed to restore the honour of the canons so that they might perform their duties to God, to the apostles and to all the other holy bodies at rest in the church. In addition the cardinal wanted them to fulfil their obligations to worship the divine. In his document he says that 'he would make known the temporal and spiritual reforms according to his obligations.'<sup>13</sup>

Bessarion's talent for reform and his reputation for moral probity were amply demonstrated by this appointment. Among other duties, the pope expected him to reduce the number of canons from eight to four (*canonicorum et praebendarum numerum ad quattuor reducendi*); to publish new statutes and ordinances (*statuendi et ordinandi*); and to institute compulsory residence for the canons for the whole year in the church (*in eadem basilica per totum annum residentiam personalem fecerit*).<sup>14</sup> Bessarion responded with a comprehensive document to tackle the abuse and corruption he feared would continue to exist at SS Apostoli unless the canons were provided with just and rational rules.<sup>15</sup> The cardinal legislated on all aspects of the administration and running of the church, from the lighting of lamps before the altar, the presence of women in the canons' residence, to the duties and election of the

---

<sup>12</sup> During my stay in Rome I was able to consult the Vatican documents. Volterrano, 'Descriptio Basilicae XII Apostolorum', 1454 (BAV, Vat.lat.5560), 16v: '...effrenata horum cupiditas et noxius appetitus semper ad malum sua habitati declinans, nisi sub iuris et (?) regula limititur, prava quadam abusione, et corruptela beate beneque vivendi iustum ordinem corrumpet, sicque passim divina, pariter et humana instituta acquissima deprimerent.'

<sup>13</sup> Volterrano, 'Descriptio Basilicae XII Apostolorum', 1454 (BAV, Vat.lat.5560), 16v: 'Idcirco volentes ad honorem, et laudem altissimi (?) Creatoris, Apostolorum quosque Philippi et Jacobi, quorum corpora in eadem ecclesia recondita sunt, et aliorum Apostoli, sub quos nominibus dicta ecclesia conservata est, proque ampliacione divini cultus respicies, ac est ex debito nostri tituli, quia eidem praesidentes ecclesie ad id nos cognoscimus obligatos, infra scriptis edidimus super reformationem praefate ecclesie, ac Ministros eiusdem institutiones, reformationes tam spiritualium que temporalium.'

<sup>14</sup> Appendix to Aloysius Bandini, *Commentarius*, PG, 161, lxi-lxiv.

<sup>15</sup> 'Quoniam effrenata hominum cupiditas et noxius appetitus, semper ad malum sua labilitate declinans, nisi sub iuris et rationis regula limitetur, prava quadam abusione et corruptela bene vivendi iustum ordinem corrumpit...' Appendix to Aloysius Bandini, *Commentarius*, PG, 161, lxiv-lxx.

*camerarius*. The number of masses was set at two per day, instructions on the administering of the sacrament were issued, and regular oaths were to be sworn by the canons.

Evidence of the cardinal's personal involvement with the administrative changes lies in a letter he wrote on 19 February 1444 to the canons of SS Apostoli to accompany the reforms. Through rhetoric and exhortation to make improvements, Bessarion was clearly endeavouring to motivate them. He writes of the new constitution,

Therefore to them [the reforms], favoured sons, all of you prick up your ears, apply your intellect quickly, gathering the harvest seed, which the providential father has scattered in the fields of your devotion, thus foster your studies diligently because that which is scattered will yield and the works of your labour will achieve the hoped for end..<sup>16</sup>

The cardinal's importance and status with regards to SS Apostoli was acknowledged on 30 April 1463 when Pius II issued a bull with which Bessarion was granted permission to restore the chapel of S. Eugenia in the basilica as his burial site..<sup>17</sup> This was a mutually beneficial project: the cardinal would enhance his reputation by restoring a prominent chapel, and the pope would guarantee that a cult site (that of Saints Eugenia, Claudia and the twelve martyrs) would be reinvigorated..<sup>18</sup> Although the

---

<sup>16</sup> 'Ad eas igitur, filii dilecti, inclinate unanimiter aures vestras, adhibite promptitudinis intellectum, colligentes seminum fructus, quos in agro vestrae devotionis providentia paterna conspergit, sic ea culturi studio diligenti, quod sparsa fructificent et operosi laboris speratam utilitatem conducant.' Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 449. Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>17</sup> 'Sane pro parte tua nobis nuper exhibita petitio continebat quod tu capellam sub invocatione S. Eugeniae in basilica XII Apostolorum de Urbe sitam, quae indotata existit et restauratione indiget, pro tuae et tuorum progenitorum animarum salute sub invocatione Ss. Michaelis archangeli et Joannis Baptistae, restaurare, libris, paramentis et aliis ecclesiasticis ornamentis ad divinum cultum necessariis fulcire, ac competentibus pro uno presbytero, qui inibi missas et alia divina officia celebret...' Appendix to Aloysius Bandini, *Commentarius*, PG, 161, lxxvi-lxxvii.

<sup>18</sup> 'Nos igitur, qui cultum ipsum divinum augeri intensius desideramus affectibus, dictum tuum propositum in Domino plurimum commendantes, tuisque huiusmodi, qui etiam praedictam basilicam in commendam obtines, pro ipsius basilicae decore et cultus praedicti in ea augmento devotis supplicationibus inclinati, tibi capellam

chapel was already dedicated to Saints Eugenia and Claudia, it is noteworthy that the pope granted Bessarion permission to extend this to Saints Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist. Since there is some debate over whether all the frescoed scenes were commissioned by Bessarion himself, this early reference to St Michael is relevant in the discussion below.

Bessarion devoted much time to SS Apostoli and the chapel of S. Eugenia throughout the 1460s, although the decoration may not have been completed by the cardinal's death in 1472. He described the details of how the chapel would function in two wills, dated 17 February 1464 and 10 April 1467. How the chapel was to be used is relevant to the character of the decorative programme and should be borne in mind in any argument that considers the burial chamber as a functioning space rather than a collection of unrelated images. By these dates the entire church had been handed over to the Order of Friars Minor, at the request of the cardinal.<sup>19</sup> His burial chapel was to be the site of a mass to be said by the religious brothers and the inhabitants of the church on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. These masses were to include his name among the living during his lifetime and among the dead after his death with special reference to Isidore (the former patriarch of Constantinople) and Dositheos the bishop (one of Bessarion's former mentors). Bessarion also wanted his parents Theodore and Theodora mentioned. He made provision for a stipend of 30 gold ducats for the upkeep of the chapel, and there were arrangements for the administration of his wishes should the friars become unable to carry out their duties.<sup>20</sup> Further paragraphs list the church furnishings that the cardinal donated to the church, including a missal. The second will which Bessarion produced in 1467 reiterated the instructions for

---

praedictam restaurari, reparari faciendi, libris, paramentis et ornamentis...' Appendix to Aloysius Bandini, *Commentarius*, PG, 161, lxxvi-lxxvii.

<sup>19</sup> Cardinal Bessarion became Cardinal Protector of this Order following the death of Domenico Capranica in 1458. While the Franciscans had not officially divided the Order between Conventuals and Observants, Bessarion was clearly appointed because of his inclination to reform and reconciliation. F. Ciatti, *Annales Ordinis Minorum*, II (1351-1507): 'Bessarion Cardinalis Nicaenus... amavit unice Conventuales, quorum quieti studens, ipsis concessit Basilicam Sanctorum Duodecim Apostolorum, in qua Conventualium pietati se remittens, etiam sepeliri voluit.' Ciatti, ms. C., II, f. 212. Ciatti was writing a history of the Franciscan Order in the early seventeenth century.

<sup>20</sup> See appendix, 231-38.

the running of the chapel in perpetuity. He added further details about the masses to be performed in the chapel, giving instructions for a mass for the holy angels on Mondays; for John the Baptist on Tuesdays and for the Holy Trinity (with a special commemoration of St Eugenia) on Thursdays. In addition a vigil for the dead and a solemn mass for the deceased were to be sung every September, the month in which the Feast of St Michael was celebrated by the Latin Church..<sup>21</sup>

On 16 October 1467 Paul II confirmed the grant of the chapel of S. Eugenia to Bessarion with another bull..<sup>22</sup> He repeated Pius' permission for the cardinal to restore, decorate and furnish the chapel:

he desired to sufficiently endow the chapel, to renew the praise and glory of the omnipotent God and to dedicate it to Saints Michael the Archangel, John the Baptist and Eugenia and to provide it with not only books and apparel, but also with the necessary ecclesiastical decoration for divine worship....<sup>23</sup>

He specified that the site would be used to celebrate mass and the divine office: '...a presbyter where masses and divine office would be celebrated...'..<sup>24</sup> Later in the document the pope makes a specific mention of the chapel's use as a burial chamber, 'he [Bessarion] elected [to put] his tomb in it...'..<sup>25</sup>

## The Decoration of the Chapel

Large sections of the frescoes for the chapel are missing, making it difficult to determine the complete decorative scheme. The chapel was painted with five different sections: the ceiling (whose frescoes have been lost); the semi-dome of the apse (which is partially intact); an upper register of the apse wall

---

<sup>21</sup> See appendix, 231-38.

<sup>22</sup> Bandini, *Commentarius*, PG, xci-xciv.

<sup>23</sup> '...uno capellano sufficienter dotare desiderabat, ad omnipotentis Dei laudem et gloriam reparare ac sub invocatione SS. Michaelis archangeli et Joannis Baptistae ac S. Eugeniae intitulare, nec non libris, paramentis et aliis ecclesiasticis ornamentis divino cultui necessariis fulcire...' Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>24</sup> '...uno presbytero inibi missas et divina officia celebraturo...' Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>25</sup> '...et in ea suam sepultram elegerit...' Translation Laura Bolick.

(whose scenes have survived); a lower register (completely missing); and a fictive section of painted drapery (no longer extant).

Determining the fresco programme depends on a combination of what we can see today and five sources of information. Two surviving sets of instructions from Bessarion to Antoniazzo Romano dated 14 September 1464 and 23 August 1465 provide the earliest of this evidence. Both contracts provide similar details:

...he should make a Christ in the centre with four angels and in each of the four corners there should be an Evangelist with a Latin and Greek doctor on each side, sitting in a study writing. The whole scene should be set against an azure background with stars and necessary friezes. Beneath the windows two windows [sic] should be depicted with marble and columns. In the centre there should be two angels on one side and an angel and figure of St John the Baptist on the other. From the central space to the ground there should be a cloth with flowers and gold....<sup>26</sup>

These instructions are perplexing since they do not make reference to anything that is visible today. The cross vault in which the Evangelists and Church doctors were to be depicted has been destroyed, as has the fictive drapery which was to decorate the lower part of the wall..<sup>27</sup> The reference to four windows, however, may be an instruction to divide the wall into four panels. It must be assumed that

---

<sup>26</sup> '... in medio faciet Christum cum quatuor angelis, item in quolibet quatuor angulorum unum Evangelistam, et ex utraque parte unius Evangelistae unum Doctorem graecum et alium latinum, sedentes in studio scribentes, totum residuum voltae stellatum cum azurio et frigiis necessariis, in parietibus sub fenestris duas fenestras depinctas cum marmoribus et columnis, deinde infra fenestras usque ad medietatem totius longitudinis duos angelos in uno pariete, in altero vero unum angelum et unum Sanctam Joannem Baptistam. Ab alia medietate usque ad terram pannos cum floribus et auro similitudinem capellae usque ad arcum exteriorem inclusive. In quolibet pilastro unum sanctum, id est in sex partibus cum tabernaculo, arcum exteriorem subtus, cum frigiis et tribus armis ipsius Rmi domini cardinalis depinget.' Extract printed in Muntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes*, 82-83. Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>27</sup> While it could be argued that the representation of the Church Doctors may have expressed a Unionist statement, the depiction of Greek and Latin figures together was not uncommon in Italy. For example, see Mantegna's Ovetari Chapel in Padua (1448-57), Ghirlandaio's Santa Fina Chapel in San Gimignano (1477-78), and The Portinari Chapel in Sant'Eustorgio, Milan (1460-68).

these contracts provided only partial instructions to Antoniazzo and that there were other documents or verbal agreements that went into greater detail.

To get behind the 'new' eighteenth-century retaining wall, erected by the architect Ludovico Sassi, in order to see the remains of the Bessarion chapel (Figure 2), the visitor enters through a door and steps down into a small vestibule with a spiral staircase. This space was created when the chapel was sealed up and reduced in size by two-thirds.<sup>28</sup> Sandwiched between the stairs and the east wall is a narrow tunnel which descends via a step onto a transparent platform which was added by the twentieth-century restorers. This platform is still higher than the original floor level, which cannot be determined by the visitor since the transparent walkway covers a trench containing an excavation site to the depth of the pre-fifteenth-century church floor. Frequent floods from the River Tiber caused architects over the centuries to raise the floor level in the basilica to mitigate the flood damage.

Looking at the apse, the viewer sees the semi dome with its frescoed nine ranks of angels. Only the lower half of the semi dome is extant, although the feet of Christ and the pointed edge of his mandorla are still visible in the centre (Figure 3). The lower part of the apse basin is filled with frescoes of angels standing in vertical rows, the majority of which are in good condition. Beneath the apse semi dome where the wall is divided into two horizontal registers there are two scenes showing miraculous appearances of St Michael in the guise of a bull at Monte Gargano and at Monte Tumba (Mont-St-Michel).

In the lower register now, where the original paintings commissioned by Bessarion would have been, are two large images of Saints Claudia and Eugenia (Figures 4 and 5) (neither of which is

---

<sup>28</sup> Tiberia, *Antoniazzo Romano*, 12.

contemporaneous with the fifteenth-century programme).<sup>29</sup> flanking a central aedicule, which dates from the fifteenth century (Figure 6). On the extreme right-hand side is a small fragment of what may have been a scene from the Life of John the Baptist. Above the altar on the east wall there was an icon of the Madonna and Child painted by Antoniazio Romano. This panel has been moved to the Chapel of the Immaculate Virgin in the main basilica.

Although the chapel was deemed lost, art historians have known about the existence of the fresco cycle commissioned by Bessarion from the seventeenth century. In his *Compendio historico della Ven. Basilica di SS Dodeci Apostoli di Roma, sua Fondazione, Origine, Nobilità, Sito, pretiosi Tesori delle Sante Reliquie, che in quella si contengono* of 1665, Padre F. Bonaventura Malvasia provided the earliest description (after Bessarion) of the Chapel of S. Eugenia as it appeared in its seventeenth-century form:<sup>30</sup>

...this document is an authentic copy [of what] was in our Archive of SS Apostoli, since in this chapel, besides the rich endowment, which he bestowed on it, as we shall see at his residence, he left them also all his money, his apparel and other precious things that he had. He ordered that it should be painted, as was executed, above the vault our Lord with nine choirs of angels. Below he had the Apparition of St Michael at Monte Gargano done and below that finally the Nativity of St John the Baptist. Above the vault of the Arch the four evangelists were painted, as well as the four doctors of the Latin Church and the four doctors of the Greek Church. These pictures were badly damaged over time and suffered greatly from the humidity, they fell off

---

<sup>29</sup> In my opinion, it seems likely that these images of the saints were executed in the seventeenth century when the chapel was walled up and the surfaces whitewashed.

<sup>30</sup> Malvasia, *Compendio historico*, 36-40.



and were ruined so badly that one was forced out of necessity for the embellishment of the Chapel to whitewash them..<sup>31</sup>

Secondary sources draw heavily on Malvasia's description of Bessarion's chapel to reconstruct the original fifteenth-century appearance. It is generally assumed that the priest personally saw the decorated chapel and provided a visual record of the fresco programme..<sup>32</sup> This may be the case but the evidence in the priest's words is ambiguous. Malvasia himself attributed his description to a documented will, which could have been the extant will of Bessarion, in the archives of SS Apostoli: '...quale testamento ne stà copia autentica nel nostro Archivio di SS. Apostoli...' Furthermore, he wrote about the decoration being '...è dato di bianco...' Malvasia seems to be basing his description on the 'testamento' and it is questionable whether he could have seen the scenes themselves as they were underneath a coat of white paint. However, his identification of the nine choirs of angels and the Gargano episode match what is now visible on the walls, and his written sketch of the vault with the Evangelists and Church doctors concurs with the extant contract between Bessarion and Antoniazzo Romano. Malvasia clearly links the missing document with Bessarion's programme and adds an additional layer of confirmation that the cardinal was indeed the patron of the decorative scheme that is visible today.

---

<sup>31</sup> '...del quale testamento ne stà copia autentica nel nostro Archivio di SS. Apostoli, poiche in questa Cappella, oltre la dote opulenta, con che la dotò, come vedremo al suo luogo, gli lasciò ancora tutti li suoi argenti, apparati, e cose più pretiose, ch'egli havesse: Ordinò che fosse dipinta, come fù essequito; sopra la volta vi era dipinto il Salvatore con li novi chori degli Angeli, più sotto la fac. Historia dell'Apparitione dell'Archangelo S. Michele nel Monte Gargano; più à basso, finalmente la Natività di S. Gio. Battista; sopra la volta dell'Arcone vi erano dipinti li quattro Evangelisti, li quattro Dottori della Chiesa Latina, e li quattro della Chiesa Greca, le quali pitture dall'ingiuria del tempo, e dalla grande humidità havendo grandemente patito, sono andate continuamente cadendo e rovinando in tanto, che sforzato dalla necessità per abbellimento della Cappella se gli è dato di bianco.' Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>32</sup> Vitaliano Tiberia contradicts himself when he states that the chapel walls were whitewashed in 1545 (no documentary evidence is offered for this date) and later bases his reconstruction on Malvasia's description. *Antoniazzo Romano*, 11, 17.

Malvasia is also the only source for the lower register scenes. He mentioned a Birth of John the Baptist, which presumably featured to the left of the aedicule. As he omits to describe the second Miracle of St Michael scene in the upper right-hand register, so he fails to refer to the lower right-hand image. Episodes from the Life of John the Baptist would be logical in a chapel dedicated to the saint, and as Malvasia correctly identified the Gargano episode as well as the choir of angels there is little reason to doubt him here. Again, the existence of a missing document must be presumed since, rather than a narrative scene, Bessarion's only extant description, mentioned above, includes the request for a figure of St John the Baptist accompanied by an angel. The only remaining trace of these images is a partial figure on the extreme right side of the lower register. The originals were likely destroyed by the humidity and frequent flooding of which Malvasia complained. At some point the figures of the two female saints were added, presumably after Malvasia was writing since he does not mention them.

Bessarion's fresco commission remained undiscovered until 1959 when Clemente Busiri-Vici found the preserved chapel and published his article a year later in *Fede e Arte*.<sup>33</sup> While working on the adjacent Palazzo Colonna, Busiri-Vici and a group of architects found a whitewashed apse with illegible traces of colour. By carefully removing the top layer they were able to reveal parts of the fresco cycle below the paint.

Based on its location and the description by Padre Malvasia, Busiri-Vici and his team identified the space as the site of the lost burial chapel of Cardinal Bessarion. A couple of fragments on the semi dome of the apse were revealed showing the lower edge of the mandorla in which Christ stood as well as the body of a cherubim. However, the apse wall decoration was more fully uncovered. Two fictive cornices framing a space of four metres in height were visible running in bands horizontally across the apse. The upper cornice appeared to be a frieze with cherub heads on a red background (Figure 7). The

---

<sup>33</sup> Busiri-Vici, 'Un ritrovamento eccezionale', 70-83.

lower border showed fragments of inscriptions describing the scenes. They could see the vertical candelabra reaching from the bottom cornice to the top, dividing the wall vertically into two (Figure 8). It was evident that the picture space was originally divided into four compartments by way of a horizontal border..<sup>34</sup> Busiri-Vici was able to identify the Miracle of St Michael at Monte Gargano in the upper left-hand compartment..<sup>35</sup> Adjacent to this scene, separated by the fictive candelabra, the gathering of citizens behind a bishop could be seen before another mountain with a bull. Busiri-Vici, unable to see the second inscription, interpreted this second scene as a continuation of the Gargano narrative and identified the mitred figure as the Bishop of Siponto who had led a procession to the site of the miracle..<sup>36</sup> The lower register was in an even more ambiguous state. In the centre, below the fictive candelabra he could see a fifteenth-century aedicule flanked by frescoes of two female saints whom Busiri-Vici speculated were Eugenia and Claudia. These figures are stylistically and proportionally at odds with the work on the upper scenes and semi dome, suggesting to the architect that they were later additions..<sup>37</sup>

The restoration work of 1989-90 revealed a further complication for the art historian to take into account in any interpretation of Bessarion's project. It became apparent that the upper register's right-hand scene was not the second part of the Gargano story but a rendering of the Miracle of Monte Tumba inscribed APPARATIO EIUSDEM IN MONTE TUMBA. Vitaliano Tiberia tackles this in his book *Antoniazio Romano per il Cardinale Bessarione*, identifying this site with Mont-St-Michel, the islet in the bay of St Malo which was only accessible by foot at low tide. Not only was Tumba another name for Mont-St-Michel, but the artist has painted shells littering the ground under the feet of the gathered worshippers, implying proximity to the sea (Figure 9).

<sup>34</sup> Busiri-Vici, *Un ritrovamento eccezionale*, 79.

<sup>35</sup> Busiri-Vici, *Un ritrovamento eccezionale*, 76-79: in 1959 the following inscription under the left-hand scene could be read, 'APPA...A...MONTE...GANO'.

<sup>36</sup> Busiri-Vici, *Un ritrovamento eccezionale*, 80. Malvasia also makes no mention of the inscriptions in his description of the chapel frescoes. This could be further evidence that he did not personally see the fresco scheme but wrote his description using an earlier account as his source.

<sup>37</sup> Busiri-Vici, *Un ritrovamento eccezionale*, 81.

Using Vitaliano Tiberia's reconstruction (Figure 10), the frescoes' features can be speculatively defined. This hypothesis is based on what can be seen today and what Malvasia described. In the ceiling the segments of the cross vaults were filled with figures of the Evangelists flanked by doctors of the Church on a starry, azure background. This ceiling surmounted a square room with an apse on the south wall which was divided horizontally into four levels. At the top Tiberia shows the Christ in Majesty surrounded by the choir of angels. Beneath he incorporates the St Michael scenes. However, he proposes that the lower register (now destroyed) was also probably formed of two panels, framed by additional candelabra, which may have depicted scenes from the Life of St John the Baptist. Presumably the lower horizontal border also contained inscriptions identifying the scenes. Beneath this lower register Tiberia includes in his reconstruction a decorated or painted cloth stretching to the floor. Some caution must be maintained about Tiberia's interpretation since the lower register in particular was neither described by Bessarion himself nor can it be seen today.

### **St Michael the Archangel: Iconography**

Traditionally the hierarchy of angels in the apse semi dome is interpreted separately from the St Michael legend in the upper register of the apse wall. In the present thesis both cycles are looked at individually before being drawn together to propose an alternative reading, which will focus on the relation of the decoration with the use of the chapel. This interpretation will propose that the iconographical programme, when examined in relation to the chapel's function, was western in character. Evidence for this conclusion can be found in the textual and visual sources for the contents of the chapel's iconography.

#### *The Upper Register: Textual Sources for the St Michael Legends*

Bessarion's most likely sources for the story of St Michael's appearance to man in the form of a bull were *The Golden Legend* of Jacopo de Voragine and the *Liber d'apparitione S. Michaelis in Monte Gargano* by an anonymous writer, both of which were written in the West.

According to the *The Golden Legend*, St Michael made his first appearance in 390 in Apuleia near the town of Siponto on a mountain which came to be known as Monte Gargano. That this miracle was thought to be Michael's first appearance may have given it sufficient importance to feature prominently in Bessarion's chapel. The legend relates the tale of the herdsman Garganus who shot his errant bull with a poisonous arrow only for the arrow to be reversed, killing him and leaving the bull unharmed. Astounded and confused by the death of Garganus, the townsmen went to the bishop to recount the tale and to ask what it signified. That night the bishop saw a vision of St Michael who told him he had assumed the form of a bull. The next day the whole town formed a procession and went to pray before the cave where the miracle had occurred..<sup>38</sup>

The second text, the *Liber d'apparitione*, which is divided into Lectios or chapters, also begins with the tale of Garganus and his wandering bull..<sup>39</sup> It tells essentially the same story as *The Golden Legend* and has a pedigree which might have made it a particularly interesting source for Bessarion..<sup>40</sup> Its date

---

<sup>38</sup> Voragine, *Golden Legend*, II, 201-11.

<sup>39</sup> 'Erat autem in ea civitate quidam homo predives nomine Garganus, qui ex eventu suo monti vocabulum indidit. Huius dum pecora, quorum infinita multitudine pollebat, passim per devexi montis latera pascere, contigit taurum, armenti gregis consortia spernentem, singularem incedere solito et ad extremum, redeuntibus pecudibus, domum non esse regressum. Quem dominus, collecta servorum multitudine, per devia quemque requirens, invenit tandem in vertice montis in foribus cuiusdam assistere speluncae, iraque permotus cur solivagus incederet, arripit arcu, appetit illum sagitta toxicata. Quae velut venti flamine retorta eum a quo jactata est mox reversa percussit.' Lectio II, *Liber de Apparitione*, printed in Bouet and Desbordes, *Chroniques latines*, 127.

<sup>40</sup> The *Liber d'Apparitione* tells the tale of an army of pagans who set out to pillage Benevento and Siponto, the regions around Monte Gargano and the main city Naples. The local Christians succeeded in defeating the invaders with the intervention of St Michael. Historically the Greeks occupied Naples at this time, and historians believe that the pagans were meant to represent the Greek invaders and the Beneventans and Sipontans represented the Lombards who chased the Byzantines back to the sea. For more on the historical background see Belli d'Elia, 'Il toro, la montagna, il vescovo. Considerazioni su un tema iconografico', 576-618.

of composition is disputed – it seems to have been written at some time between the late seventh century and the end of the eighth century..<sup>41</sup> The *Liber d'apparitione* was probably composed by a Lombard writer to promote the cult of St Michael. The Archangel held a special place among the Lombards after he appeared to soldiers of the king, Cunincpert at the Battle of Coronate (689) against Alahis the Usurper. From this time on the Lombards minted coins decorated with the image of St Michael..<sup>42</sup> In the tenth century, when the Greeks recaptured the area, a translation of the *Liber d'apparitione* was produced in Greek which endeavoured to depict the cult at Gargano as a Byzantine initiative with roots in an earlier Byzantine occupation of the region. Several possibilities arise from the prospect that Bessarion knew of the *Liber d'apparitione* and drew on it as a source for the iconography in his chapel. He may have known of it in its original Lombard form and therefore commissioned a visual interpretation of a western text. Or he may have been aware only of the Greek translation and understood the story within the Byzantine tradition. A third possibility lies in a fusion of the two: the cardinal deliberately selected the episode from the *Liber* because of its complex Latin and Greek origins. In fact in his article on the *Liber d'apparitione*, Nicholas Everett points out that in the second half of the ninth century the *Apparatio in Monte Tumbae* was written about the founding of the church at Mont-St-Michel, the subject of the second St Michael panel in Bessarion's chapel. This text was a clear imitation of the original *Liber d'apparitione*..<sup>43</sup> Evidently a tradition of linking the two miracles was well established by the time that Bessarion adopted the themes for his chapel.

The second scene (in the upper register of the apse wall) has provoked more debate. Clemente Busiri-Vici interpreted it as the second part of the St Michael narrative about Gargano in which the bishop of

---

<sup>41</sup> Everett, 'The *Liber de Apparitione*', 364-89. The debate over the dating of the *Liber d'apparitione* can be found in Otranto, *Il 'Liber d'apparitione', il santuario*, 210-45 and in Otranto, *Il 'Liber d'apparitione' e il culto*, 423-42. Our earliest extant manuscript is in the Stiftsbibliothek, St Gall, 558 and 550, and it has been dated to the ninth century.

<sup>42</sup> Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardum*, V, 41 published by Monumenta Germaniae Historica: *Scriptores rerum Langobardum et Italicarum saec. VI-XI*, ed. G. Waitz, Hannover 1878. See also Everett, 'The *Liber d'Apparitione*', 374.

<sup>43</sup> Everett, 'The *Liber d'Apparitione*' cites also S. Bettochi, 'Note su due tradizioni michaelichi altomedievali: il Gargano e Mont-Saint-Michel', *Vetera Christianorum*, 31 (1994), 333-55.

Siponto leads a procession to the foot of the mountain (Figure 11). Psalms are sung by Basilian and Franciscan monks and the citizens carry candles (Figure 12). The bishop is robed and the scene is set for a mass (Figure 13). This interpretation is lifted directly from Lectio VIII of the *Liber d'apparitione* when the bishop establishes the celebration of services and the singing of psalms before the cave..<sup>44</sup>

However the inscription beneath the scene in the chapel reads APPARATIO IN EIUSDEM MONTE TUMBA. It is not a development in the Gargano story but a separate event. Tumba was the site of the archangel's second appearance which occurred in 710. The Bishop of Avranches, St Aubert had a vision of St Michael who told him to build a church in his name. When the bishop asked where the church should be erected Michael instructed him to find the spot where thieves had hidden a bull and to trace the dimensions of the church by following the bull's hoof prints. The idea of a miraculous outline of a church was familiar in a Roman context after the famous snowfall in August, during Pope Liberius' pontificate, which allegedly left the outline of the church of S. Maria Maggiore. Apart from sharing the unusual iconography of a saint in the form of a bull, the Tumba and Gargano links are further developed in *The Golden Legend* in particular: 'When the church [of Mont-St-Michel] was built, they brought from Monte Gargano a cutting from the mantle St Michael had spread over the altar there and a slab of marble on which he had stood, and placed them in the church.'<sup>45</sup>

Tiberia proposes an elaborate interpretation of this scene. He identifies St Aubert with Louis XI of France (1423-83) as part of a massive propaganda effort on the part of the patron of the frescoes to persuade the French king to support a crusade. According to this theory, the bull tied to a tree

---

<sup>44</sup> 'Vertex vero montis ipsius extrinsecus partim cornea silva tegitur, partim virenti planitiae dilatatur. Missarum itaque celebratione completa, magno attoniti gaudio redierunt in sua. Episcopus autem, delegato ministrorum, cantorum sacerdotumque officio et mansione constructa, omnem ibidem cotidie psalmorum missarumque cursum congruo precepit ordine caelebrari.' Lectio VIII, *Liber de Apparitione*, printed in Bouet and Desbordes, *Chroniques latines*, 135.

<sup>45</sup> Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, II, 202.

represents the paralysis of the French in the face of the threat of the Ottomans. Only Louis can free St Michael to defend Christianity..<sup>46</sup> Tiberia's explanation for Bessarion's choice of this episode lies in the cardinal's efforts to convince Louis XI of France to support a crusade. By giving such prominence to the French relationship with the archangel and by implying a regal connection with St Aubert, the cardinal was allegedly using his burial chapel as a propaganda tool to flatter the French king. This hypothesis might make sense if the frescoes had been painted in 1471-72 when Bessarion was actively involved in his campaign to secure French support, but the documentary evidence dates the chapel decoration to 1464-67 when Venice, rather than France, was the focus of the cardinal's pressure for a crusade.

The episodes of the bulls can be explained on a more straightforward level. Bessarion chose two sequential scenes in the Miracles of St Michael from *The Golden Legend* (with additional influences from the *Liber d'apparitione*), and these were logically the first and the second appearances. They complement each other in the mutual appearance of the bull and are united by shared relics. Mont-St-Michel was perceived to be a second Gargano and was becoming even more popular among pilgrims than the Italian site. Bessarion's programme in a chapel dedicated to the Archangel Michael seems entirely appropriate and understandable.

### *The Upper Register: Visual Sources*

Turning to the visual sources for the iconography in the burial chapel, there is an equally strong case that these were derived from the West rather than from Byzantium. No one to date has looked at the potential visual sources for Bessarion's iconography scheme, yet the evidence from extant cycles and

---

<sup>46</sup> Tiberia, *Antoniazio Romano*, 48.



documented programmes demonstrate that the depiction of Michael as a bull was not an uncommon theme in Italy during the Renaissance.

In the Velluti Chapel at Santa Croce in Florence, for example, the scene of St Michael appearing as a bull on Monte Gargano has been depicted on the wall to accompany a fresco of the Fall of the Rebel Angels. This chapel was commissioned by Monna Gemma, the second wife of Filippo di Bonaccorso Velluti in 1321, although we are not certain to what extent she was responsible for the decoration detail. The chapel, situated in the south transept furthest from the apse, is the oldest in the basilica (which should be noted was a Franciscan church), but there is no agreement on its date.<sup>47</sup> Although this connection has never been examined by historians, it is certain that the scenes would have been visible in 1439 when Bessarion was in Florence for the Council. Like the first scene in Bessarion's chapel (Figure 14), the Florentine fresco depicts a bull on the peak of a rocky mountain which fills most of the picture plane (Figure 15). At the foot of the mount on the left-hand side is an archer holding his bow above his head. This is Garganus firing at his bull. On the right-hand side there is a procession of locals led by the bishop who is identified by his mitre and crozier. In this instance in Florence we are presumably looking at the second part of the Gargano scene rather than the separate episode at Tumba depicted in Bessarion's chapel. The S. Eugenia chapel programme appears to share the elements of the miraculous appearance with these Florentine frescoes. Unfortunately there seems to be no documentary evidence or even speculation by historians to explain the choice of the iconography.

---

<sup>47</sup> Gardner, 'The Early Decoration', 391-93. Gardner notes that the foundation stone of the Cappella Maggiore was laid in 1294 while a document dated 1310 implies that the roofing was complete. Further chronology for the construction of the chapels can be deduced from the progress of the stained glass which was studied by H. Van Straelen in *Studien zu florentiner Glasmalerei des Trecento e Quattrocento*, Wattencheid 1938, 9-13. The attribution of the Velluti Chapel fresco cycle to the early fourteenth century is based on stylistic analysis.

There is further evidence of other Italian representations of these scenes of St Michael's miracles. Fifty kilometres south-west of Siena, Biagio di Goro Ghezzi painted a St Michael cycle for the Umiliati church of San Michele in 1368 at Paganico. Paganico was an important centre in the Late Middle Ages and may have been known to Bessarion. On the north wall of the choir Goro Ghezzi painted three scenes from the Miracles of St Michael: his appearance on Monte Gargano as a bull; the archangel vanquishing the dragon; and his appearance on the roof of the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome.<sup>48</sup> Even if Bessarion were unaware of this fresco cycle, it is evident that the depiction of St Michael at Monte Gargano was not unknown in trecento and quattrocento Italian painting.

By examining extant documentary evidence, it is apparent that in Rome the theme of St Michael's appearance at Monte Gargano was also topical in the 1460s. We have the will, which was drawn up on 25 July 1468, of Giovanni dei Foschi de Berta, a canon of S. Maria Maggiore, describing the decoration of a chapel he endowed in the thirteenth-century church S. Nicola in Columna Traiani (Trajan's Column). Unfortunately the church was destroyed by 1560-70. The canon donated a sum of money which was to be spent on an image of the Crucifix before the altar with images of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist on either side. And on the side walls the story of St Michael of Monte Gargano was to be depicted to honour the omnipotence of God, the glorious Virgin Mary, Saints Michael and John and all the saints of God.<sup>49</sup>

### *St Michael in Byzantium*

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the history of the Paganico frescoes see the monograph by Freuler, *Biagio di Goro Ghezzi*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> 'Relinquo capelle mee per me noviter hedificate in ecclesia S. Nicolai in columpna Traiani pro pictura et dedicatione et eius hedificiis ducatos quinquaginta expendendos in hunc modum videlicet: ante altare et pro oratorio altaris ymaginem crucifixi et a lateribus crucifixi ymages gloriose virginis Marie et s. Iohannis Evangeliste, a lateribus dicti altaris et infra dictas ymages ymago s. Michaelis e s. Yvonis advocati pauperum, in testudine vero dicte capelle Evangeliste quatuor, a latere versus columpnam istoriam s. Michaelis de monte Gargano, ab alio istoriam s. Gregorii; tempori optavarum dedicatio dicte capelle fiat et fieri debeat ad honorem omnipotentis Dei et gloriose Virginis Marie et s. Michaelis et Yvonis et omnium sanctorum et sanctarum Dei.' Quoted in Esposito, 'La documentazione degli archivi di ospedali e confraternite', 71; ASR, Diplomatico, Ospedale della Consolazione, cas. 50, perg. 75. Seventy years later, the Gargano story was still being depicted in Rome: in the Cappella Chateauvillain of S. Trinità dei Monti, suggesting an established tradition of depicting this narrative in Italy.

While it is possible to point to a host of examples of depictions of Michael assuming the form of a bull in Italy, it has not been possible to locate evidence of this iconography in the Byzantine Empire..<sup>50</sup> That is not to say that it never existed – much art has been lost, and it is difficult to prove a negative..<sup>51</sup> However, it was evidently not a common way of representing the Archangel, and Bessarion was unlikely to have been drawing on Greek visual precedents in his choice of iconography for the chapel of S. Eugenia.

Three common ways of depicting St Michael featured in Greece and the Byzantine Empire: like an emperor in the imperial dress of the jewelled scarf or *loros* over a purple *chlamys* or gown with red shoes..<sup>52</sup> Secondly, he also appeared in a tunic with the *himation*; or finally, he would be dressed in military costume. St Michael has none of these characteristics in Bessarion's chapel. The imperial associations of the traditional Byzantine type, which were underlined by the sceptre that the archangel held in one hand and by the orb in the other, appeared most commonly when the saint was depicted in heaven..<sup>53</sup> Depictions of the archangel and the emperor shared stylistic features in their rigid, formal poses. That, combined with the lack of modelling, the flatness, and the absence of emotion, signified the immateriality of the subject and his divine status..<sup>54</sup> There are many examples of Michael dressed as an emperor in Byzantine art over the centuries: notable are the mosaics of the choir of the Church of the Dormition (after 843) in Nicaea (where Bessarion was bishop); Le Grand Pigeonnier de Cavusin (963-69) in Cappadocia; and the Archangel Michael depicted on the Pala d'Oro in Venice (c.1100)

---

<sup>50</sup> I have looked at a wide variety of cycles in Byzantine churches and chapels in institutions such as the monasteries of Meteora, Mystras and Athos. To date I have not found any narrative representations of St Michael the Archangel.

<sup>51</sup> For work on the Byzantine perspective on archangels see Glenn Peers, 'Imagination and Angelic Epiphany', 113-31.

<sup>52</sup> Maguire, 'Style and Ideology', 222. For a discussion of a narrative episode in the St Michael cycle that was represented in Byzantium see Peers, 'Holy Man, Supplicant, and Donor', 173-82.

<sup>53</sup> Maguire, 'A Murderer among the Angels', 68.

<sup>54</sup> For interpretations of why the Archangel Michael appears in imperial guise see Maguire, 'Style and Ideology', 223-24 and Joliet-Lévy, 'Note sur la représentation des archanges', 121.

from Constantinople..<sup>55</sup> In the narthex of Saint-Jean-le-Theologien in Ephesus there is another image of the Archangel whose imperial associations are reinforced with text in the inscribed hexameters by Agathos the Scholastic. The portrait represents St Michael in the act of decorating Emperor Theodore with the symbols of his offices..<sup>56</sup> Bessarion eschewed these traditional Byzantine representations and commissioned a representation of St Michael as a bull and this was a visual interpretation that had much more in common with western practices.

---

<sup>55</sup> Joliet-Lévy, 'Note sur la représentation des archanges' 121.

<sup>56</sup> Saxer, 'Jalons pour servir à l'histoire du culte de l'archange Saint Michel', 397.

Cardinal Bessarion went to great lengths to muster a crusade to liberate Constantinople after its fall in 1453. He sent impassioned pleas to Italian and northern European rulers, attempting to persuade them to make a financial or military contribution to a campaign. Words such as those he wrote to the Venetian doge Francesco Foscari are typical:

A city which was so flourishing, with such a great empire, so many illustrious men, such very famous and ancient families, so prosperous, the head of all Greece, the splendour and flower of the past, the school of the best arts, the refuge of all good things, has been captured, despoiled, ravaged and completely sacked by the most inhuman barbarians and the most savage enemies of the Christian faith, by the fiercest of wild beasts..<sup>57</sup>

In light of this preoccupation, it makes sense to ask whether the iconographical programme of Bessarion's chapel reflects the crusade agenda. Vitaliano Tiberia puts forward this hypothesis in his book on the chapel of S. Eugenia..<sup>58</sup> He writes that the fresco programme expresses Bessarion's bitterness at the western leaders' lack of interest in the Ottoman crisis and that the images are a visualisation of man's ethical imperative to challenge the earthly evils with the help of the saints and the angels who are united with God.

The interpretation of the iconography as a comment on Bessarion's crusade agenda, however, seems to have been overstated by Tiberia..<sup>59</sup> He argues that there are tangential associations in the two St Michael stories in *The Golden Legend* and the *Liber d'apparitione* with the theme of crusading. Lectio IV of the *Liber d'apparitione*, in which the Gargano story is related, goes on to describe how the pagan Neapolitans ended up in conflict with the Christian citizens of Siponto. After the bishop of Siponto

---

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Bessarion to Doge Francesco Foscari, quoted in *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, eds and trans. Ross and McLaughlin, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Tiberia, *Antoniazio Romano*, 18-23.

<sup>59</sup> Tiberia, *Antoniazio Romano*, 30.

(whom it will be recalled was involved in the incident with the bull) called for a three-day truce, during which his flock fasted, St Michael made another appearance, promising that the Christians would be victorious if they engaged in battle at the fourth hour of the next day, 8 May 663. In the morning the Christians attacked the pagans and, as the Archangel promised, they vanquished the Neapolitans. At the moment of victory there was a huge earthquake and a storm raged demonstrating that God was working through His saint..<sup>60</sup> In an added twist the pagans were so frightened by their defeat and the divine manifestations that they converted to Christianity on the battlefield..<sup>61</sup>

According to Tiberia, the reference to Siponto associates the legend with the location depicted in the paintings in the chapel while the battle between the Christians and the pagans may have been a metaphor for the struggle against the eastern heathens. However it should be borne in mind that none of these scenes is directly represented: Michael appears in the guise of a bull not a warrior; there is no battle with Lucifer; and the episode at Gargano depicts the miracle of the bull not the battle with the Neapolitans. The choice of Michael the Archangel as the subject of the upper register could be significant given his identity as a warrior saint – a heavenly soldier who might lead the Christians in battle against the Ottoman Turks. Related to this role is the archangel's battle with Lucifer. The Sultan and the Muslim forces were equated with Satan and devils who threatened the true religion with heresy. But again, Michael is not depicted in his warrior guise in either of the S. Eugenia scenes.

---

<sup>60</sup> 'Interea Neapolitani paganis adhuc ritibus oberrantes, Sipontinos ac Beneventanos, qui centum quinquaginta milibus a Siponto distant, bello lacerare temptant. Qui antistitis sui monitis edocti, triduo petunt indutias, ut triduo jejunio liceret quasi fidei patrocinio sancti Michaelis implorare presidium. Quo tempore pagani ludis scenicis falsorum invitant auxilia deorum. Ecce autem nocte ispa quae belli prederet diem adest in visionem sanctus Michael antistiti, preces eorum dixit exauditas, victoriam spondit adfuturam et quarta diei hora bello premonet hostibus occurrendum. Laeti erfo mane et de angelica certi victoria, demoniacis redactis spiritibus, obviant christiani paganis, atque in primo belli apparatu Garganus immenso tremore concutitur. Fulgura crebra volant et caligo tenebrosa totum montis cacumen obduxit, inpleta prophetia quae Dominum laudans ait, "Qui facit angelos suos spiritus et ministros suos flammam ignis." Lection IV, *Liber de Apparitione*, printed in Bouet and Desbordes, *Chroniques latines*, 129.

<sup>61</sup> 'Qui hoc autem evasere periculum, comperto quod angelus Dei in adiutorium venerit christianis – nam et sexcentos ferme suorum fulmine videbant interemptos -, regi regum Christo continuo colla submittentes, armis induuntur fidei.' Lectio V, *Liber de Apparitione*, printed in Bouet and Desbordes, *Chroniques latines*, 130.

## The Apse Semi Dome: Iconography of the Angelic Hierarchy

In the semi dome of the apse Cardinal Bessarion commissioned a fresco of the nine choirs of angels surrounding a Christ in Majesty. The figure of Christ is no longer extant, but from the remaining fragments in the apse, it appears that his robed body was hovering against a mandorla, encircled by angels, with the cherubim and seraphim closest to his person (Figure 17). The angels, which survive mostly intact, have been arranged in nine ranks and in each row the figures are identically dressed to distinguish them from the adjacent type. They converse with each other across the boundaries of their columns, and their postures and facial expressions vary (Figure 18). Authors such as Tiberia argue that this iconographic scheme was based on the angelology of the Greek pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and is therefore interpreted as evidence that Bessarion was deploying a Greek theme in the apse semi dome. Links with Neoplatonism can be determined in the depiction of a hierarchy of angels, and this interpretation has always been offered as evidence of Bessarion's embodiment of Byzantine culture. However, it is argued here that the link with Pseudo-Dionysius was inspired by a western outlook and that this iconography was actually rooted in western literature and in a western visual tradition.

### *Textual Sources*

*The Celestial Hierarchy* written by the Neoplatonist philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the sixth century AD would have been an attractive literary source for the cardinal's iconographic programme in the apse semi dome.<sup>62</sup> In this work Pseudo-Dionysius describes the nine choirs of angels and their functions. We know that Bessarion was an avid reader of the philosopher and that he

---

<sup>62</sup> The writings are the forged texts of Dionysius the Areopagite who was said to have been converted by St Paul at Athens and subsequently became the first bishop of that city. In fact his work was compiled in Syria by a Christian Neoplatonist with Monophysite leanings, and it became fundamental to Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. For an introduction to Dionysius' biography and his writings see Farina's edited volume of Pseudo-Dionysius' *Complete Works*.

collected books by the Pseudo-Dionysius and by his followers..<sup>63</sup> It is important to acknowledge, however, that the cardinal's interest in this Neoplatonist writer was a reflection of a trend in western scholarship with which Bessarion was actively engaged. For that reason *The Celestial Hierarchy* should be viewed as a Greek source that was being interpreted from a western angle. Its use as a probable literary source for the semi dome decoration in the chapel of S. Eugenia is further evidence that Bessarion conceived of his fresco scheme through a western lens.

Pseudo-Dionysius' main theme in *The Celestial Hierarchy* centres on the ascent of the soul towards divine perfection by stripping aside the senses and all inward thought and reasoning:

There is something else which I could reasonably add here. Each intelligent being, heavenly or human, has his own set, of primary, middle and lower orders and powers, and in accordance with his capacities these indicate the aforementioned uplifting, directly relative to the hierarchic enlightenment available to every being. It is in accordance with this arrangement that each intelligent entity – as far as he properly can and to the extent that he may – participates in that purification beyond purity, that superabundant light, that perfection preceding all perfection. Nothing is perfect of itself. Nothing is completely free of the need for perfection. Nothing, that is, except that Being truly perfect in himself and truly preceding all perfection..<sup>64</sup>

Enlightenment is obtained by this process of striving towards perfection and the divine. This was a Platonic concept which the Neoplatonists adapted to conform to a Christian interpretation of the Greek philosopher. Plato's perfect Being is easily identified with God, and the journey of the soul towards

---

<sup>63</sup> In the inventory of Bessarion's books compiled in 1474, there are several volumes of Pseudo-Dionysius' works. For example see Inventory B: 145, 195, 215 and 481 in Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana*.

<sup>64</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, 273C. Translated and edited by John Farina.



that source of perfection can be interpreted as the Christian life of contemplation or as the journey of the soul after death. This was clearly a fitting theme for a burial chapel.

One possibility that has not been suggested before is that, as a visual rendition of Neoplatonic theory, the depiction of the hierarchy of angels was a philosophical statement by Bessarion aimed at the western and specifically Roman circle with whom he had identified, to demonstrate the Christian potential of Plato. That Bessarion was involved in the debates of the Neoplatonists in Rome is clear from his publication of the revised edition of *In calumniatorem platonis* in 1468 – about the same time that the chapel was being frescoed. The pinnacle of his written involvement in the debate was this text in which he argued that Plato could be interpreted as a Christian philosopher. Bessarion was preoccupied throughout his Italian life with the presentation of Plato for a Latin audience. This was entirely compatible with the humanist debate in the West over the comparative merits of Plato versus Aristotle. The former was relatively unknown in western intellectual spheres until the mid-fifteenth century, and the latter had been the staple of medieval scholasticism for centuries. The cardinal entered the conflict from an unusual position: he advocated a middle road and the integration of both philosophers into the Christian canon.

There were also western writers whom Bessarion may have drawn on as sources for his iconographic programme in the chapel of S. Eugenia's apse semi dome. Bessarion was an avid reader and collector of St Augustine's works and there is evidence that he may have used one of Augustine's texts as a source for the choice of themes in the chapel. In his article on the miraculous appearance of St Michael at Monte Gargano, 'Arcadia Becomes Jerusalem', John Charles Arnold points out that St Augustine proposed animal behaviour as an allegory of the relationship between God and the angelic powers. In his work *Ennaratio in Psalmum*, Augustine described how the sheep and oxen exemplify holy minds (*animas sanctas*) and he developed the metaphor to call men '*boves*' who 'imitated the angels by

evangelizing the word of God. In such a way they behaved as apostles'..<sup>65</sup> It appears that this interpretation of the bull as an allegorical figure in a triangular relationship between God, the angels and Man resonates in Bessarion's burial chapel. This literary source links the angelic choir with the manifestation of St Michael in the form of a bull.

Gregory the Great, a later follower of St Augustine, also commented on angelology, and Bessarion would have been familiar with his writings. In his work Gregory refined Pseudo-Dionysius' structure, adding the notion of judicial power to the rank of seraphim when he described its angels as those who guarantee that God's judgement is executed..<sup>66</sup> According to St Gregory's theory, the hierarchy formed of Dominions, Virtues and Powers dominates and masters vices in humanity and thus elevates man to the level of the angels..<sup>67</sup> In Bessarion's chapel the Dominions are identifiable by their green robes, while the Virtues are dressed in purple and cross their arms over their chest. In St Gregory's structure, they were agents of signs, and miracle workers who were thought to be present at the Eucharist. In the ceiling the Powers wear red and carry a white standard bearing a red cross (Figure 19). According to the Gregorian definition these angels assist man in the combat against temptation..<sup>68</sup>

The Dominican preacher Jacopo de Voragine, whose *Golden Legend* has been suggested as a literary source for the St Michael Miracles, also wrote sermons on angels which may have been among Bessarion's sources for the nine choirs of angels in the semi dome. To posit this hypothesis raises an interesting question regarding the cardinal's philosophical position in the debate between Aristotelian

---

<sup>65</sup> Augustine of Hippo, 'Ennaratio in Psalmum 8:8-9', *Patrologia Latina*, 36, 114-15. Cited in Arnold, 'Arcadia Becomes Jerusalem', 579-80.

<sup>66</sup> 'Throni quoque illa agmina sunt vocata, quibus ad exercendum iudicium semper Deus omnipotens praesidet. Quia enim thronos Latino eloquio sedes dicimus, throni Dei dicti sunt hi qui tanta divinitatis gratia replentur, ut in eis Dominus sedet, et per eos sua iudicia decernat.' Gregory the Great, *Patrologia Latina*, 76, 1252.

<sup>67</sup> 'Ea ergo angelorum agmina, quae mira potentia praeeminent' Gregory the Great, *Patrologia Latina*, 76, 1254.

<sup>68</sup> 'Potestates etiam vocantur hi qui hoc potentius caeteris in suo ordine perceperunt, ut eorum ditioni virtutes adversae subjectae sint, quorum potestate refrenatur, ne corda hominum tantum tentare praevaleant quantum volunt.' Gregory the Great, *Homiliarium in Evangelia*, Homil. XXXIV, PL, 76, 1254.

scholasticism and Neoplatonism. Having established that Pseudo-Dionysius, a staunch Platonist, was drawn on for the iconographic programme, it might seem perplexing to argue that Voragine, an equally staunch Aristotelian could also have been one of the cardinal's sources. Voragine was heavily influenced by Thomas Aquinas' works and was firmly entrenched, in western Scholastic dogma. Bessarion was known to be a follower of Aquinas from his early years in Constantinople,<sup>69</sup> and the scholar Barbara Bruderer Eichberg, who has written extensively on the nine choirs of angels, notes that the angelic hierarchy also featured in works by Thomas Aquinas such as his book *Commentarium in IV lib. Sententiarum*.<sup>70</sup> This marrying of Platonic and Aristotelian literary influences suggests that Bessarion was peddling his position in the Aristotle-Plato debate as a mediator between Scholasticism and Humanism through the decoration of his apse. The angelic hierarchy is, after all, a prime example of an instance where Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy could be united to demonstrate a Christian ideal.

### *Visual Sources*

It is important not to overlook the visual sources for the nine ranks of angels depicted in Bessarion's chapel. To date no one has considered the semi dome's imagery in the context of its artistic tradition. By making this assessment, it is possible to demonstrate that this tradition was western and not Greek. I have been unable to find evidence of the depiction of choirs of angels in extant Byzantine art. As in the case of Byzantine narrative scenes of St Michael (discussed above), this does not mean that such images never existed but their absence contrasts with the survival rate of similar scenes in western art implying that they were not common in Greek art.

---

<sup>69</sup> Monfasani, *Bessarion Latinus*, chapter 3.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, ed. R. Busa, Stuttgart 1980, vol. I, 150. See also Bruderer Eichberg, 'Les neufs choeurs angéliques', 61.

A potential source for Bessarion's iconographic scheme can be found in the cupola mosaics of the baptistery of Florence which the cardinal undoubtedly saw in 1439 during the meeting of the Council of Florence. The mosaic programme, executed throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, includes a circle of angels in the upper tier around the figure of the Creator (Figure 20). Their nine ranks are distinguished by their dress, attributes and inscriptions. In Miklos Boskovits' monograph on the baptistery mosaics, he uses stylistic analysis to date the angels to the mid-thirteenth century and to attribute them to the circle of Coppo di Marcovaldo.<sup>71</sup> He also observes that the later Italian artists who depicted choirs of angels made no effort to distinguish their individual ranks.<sup>72</sup> However, Boskovits overlooks Bessarion's chapel as an example of the evolution of the Florence baptistery programme. While the mosaics have a Byzantine flavour in their stylistic execution: frontal, rigid poses recalling the qualities of icon art, Boskovits offers a controversial opinion about the Florence project, which would support the theory that Bessarion too was actually drawing on western motifs for his chapel. The scholar writes,

What might have been the iconographic sources of the Florentine mosaicists remains unknown; but the lack of comparable images in Byzantine art seems to suggest, however, that they based themselves on western models..<sup>73</sup>

While the concept may have been western in nature, the artist chose to represent the angels in Byzantine dress, possibly copied from known images of angels or saints that were circulating in Italy. For example, the Thrones are dressed in tunics similar to the Byzantine *sakkos* (a dalmatic garment originally worn only by emperors), while the Virtues wear red mantles clasped at their right shoulders in the manner of the eastern *chlamys*. Bessarion took the theme one step closer to a programme that

---

<sup>71</sup> Boskovits, *The Mosaics of the Baptistery of Florence*, 145-51.

<sup>72</sup> Boskovits cites the mosaics of Jacopo Torriti in S. Giovanni Laterano and in S. Maria Maggiore where a host of angels is depicted but without any attempt to describe the differences in rank. Boskovits, *The Mosaics of the Baptistery of Florence*, 261.

<sup>73</sup> Boskovits, *The Mosaics of the Baptistery of Florence*, 261.

was western both in theme and in style. His ranks of angels wear long flowing robes that were very typical of Italian fifteenth-century dress for angels. An example of this attire can be found in the chapel of the Tor de'Specchi, painted contemporaneously with the chapel of S. Eugenia (Figure 21).

Although the choir of angels, arranged in ranks, in Bessarion's chapel is the only extant example in fifteenth-century Rome that I am aware of which depicts a line up of the angels with the attributes that describe their function, it was not unusual to find the relationship between Man and the heavenly host depicted in chapel frescoes in the West. A gathering of angels depicted at the deathbed scene seems to have been a feature of mid-fifteenth-century fresco commissions. In 1468 a Roman artist (identified as Antoniazio Romano) was painting the chapel of S. Francesca Romana in the Tor de'Specchi in Rome. In this scene St Francesca Romana's soul is greeted by a chorus of angels with musical instruments (Figure 22).<sup>74</sup> Whoever the artist, it is clear stylistically that the scene was contemporary with Bessarion's semi dome – the date of 1468 is inscribed at the bottom of one of the frescoes – and that it was not uncommon to associate a host of angels with the transition of the soul to heaven.

Other Roman artists were painting these groups of angels too. In 1469 in Viterbo the artist Lorenzo da Viterbo was commissioned to fresco Nardo Mazzatosta's chapel, which was constructed in the mid-fifteenth century, in S. Maria della Verità.<sup>75</sup> Above the altar he painted an enthroned Madonna and Child surrounded by a chorus of angels who were also equipped with musical instruments. The mandorla around the Madonna is made up of cherubim while the choir consists of full-figured, dressed

---

<sup>74</sup> I personally visited this chapel in 2011 and it was during this visit that I made this observation. There is very little literature on the fresco programme at the Tor de'Specchi and it needs extensive research.

<sup>75</sup> Again, I made the observation about the angel choirs during a personal visit to this chapel in Viterbo. For more information on the commission see Simonetta and Enzo Bentivoglio, 'Le Pitture di Lorenzo da Viterbo nella Cappella Mazzatosta a Viterbo', 87-104.

angels (Figure 23). Bessarion's commission of a host of angels was evidently a common theme in Italy during this period.

## The Chapel Project

Bessarion's chapel is a complex, multi-layered project but it should be regarded in its context as a burial site, and the decoration and layout interpreted accordingly. It should be conceived as a whole project rather than as an assortment of decorative elements. It is arguable that as a burial chapel it fits within a western not an eastern tradition. As mentioned above, it was in 1463 that Pope Pius II granted the cardinal permission to restore the chapel in SS Apostoli and to dedicate it to Saints Eugenia, Claudia, John the Baptist and Michael the Archangel. That this chapel was intended as Bessarion's final resting place is indicated in the bull when the pope refers to the chapel as '*pro tuae et tuorum progenitorum animarum salute...*' (for the salvation of the souls of you and your relatives).<sup>76</sup> Three years later Paul II issued another bull confirming Pius' grant and making even clearer the nature of the chapel, 'which [Bessarion] has chosen as his tomb.'<sup>77</sup>

Few art historians have addressed the chapel scheme as a whole, whose primary function was to care for the cardinal's soul after death and for his legacy in the world he left behind. Each element contributes to the main message of the fate of the soul after death. For example, the angels in the upper section of the apse embody the journey from the corporeal and earthly to the incorporeal and heavenly. The extant narrative scenes relate two miracles specific to St Michael, a saint closely linked to the fate of the soul after death. In the first story Michael deflects the poisoned arrow of Satan – a comment on the triumph over death and the redemption of Man. It was surely this role of the archangel which defined the burial chapel to a greater degree than his identity as a warrior saint.

---

<sup>76</sup> Bandini, *Commentarius*, PG, 161, lxxvi-lxxvii.

<sup>77</sup> '...in ea suam sepultram elegerit.' Bandini, *Commentarius*, PG, 161, lxxvi-lxxvii. Translation Laura Bolick.

The cardinal was clearly concerned about his legacy and the fate of his body after death. This is clear from the unusually detailed and rather unique instructions he left for the interment of his corpse. Bessarion's tomb was to be placed against the right-hand corner of the chancel which circled the altar on the north wall, facing the nave of the basilica. A hole was to be dug in the ground to a depth of eight feet and all four sides were to be walled. However the base was to be left open. The cardinal wanted the tomb to be raised two feet above the bottom of the hole and his corpse to lie on an iron gridiron. Rising two feet above this would be supports for a marble slab which would lie flat on the paving of the chapel. The whole ensemble was to be surmounted by a beautiful marble table which was to be inscribed with 'Bessarion, Bishop of Tusculum, cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, patriarch of Constantinople', followed by the date of his death (Figure 73).<sup>78</sup>

In 1466 the tomb was constructed (Figure 24) and the notary Marino Vitellio recorded that:

Before the said altar [of S. Eugenia] is a balustrade of marble, partly straight and partly curving, from Sicilian spolia, and a step before a little niche [...], situated not far from the ground are two inscriptions in marble, one near the flooring with an inscription in Greek, the other carved in low relief all'antica with the coat of arms of the renowned and famous Cardinal Bessarion....<sup>79</sup>

Vitellio described the curved and straight sides of the balustrade and the step before the niche (presumably the aedicule). He noted that there are two inscriptions in marble – the one near the paving was in Greek and the other was carved in low relief all'antica with the arms of Cardinal Bessarion. The

---

<sup>78</sup> See appendix, 231-38.

<sup>79</sup> Archivio dei 30 notari capitolini, uffic. 18, 1702, vol. 565 ff. 443-89 and Archivio Ss Apostoli, Ms. C. 17, f. 347v, cited in Coccia, 'Il Cardinale Bessarione', 44: 'Avanti il detto altare (di S. Eugenia) vi è la balastrata di marmo, parte dritta e parte centinata, con suoi balaustri di diasporo di Sicilia, e suo gradino avanti di nicchione, cioè a cornu epistolae, si vedon situate non molto alte da terra, due iscrizioni di marmo, cioè una vicino al pavimento con l'inscrizione greca, cioè una scolpite di basso rilievo all'antica, con lo stemma dell'insigne e celebre Cardinal Bessarione...' Translation Laura Bolick.

latter inscription, which was situated above the Greek was in Latin. These inscriptions were moved over the course of the various reconstruction phases and are now to be found in the choir and second cloister of the basilica. Bessarion may have been leaving a legacy as a champion of the Greek language but it should be noted that the Latin text took place of precedence as the first of these inscriptions.

Bessarion's burial requirements fit within a Latin tradition for honouring the life of an important figure. It was not unusual for prominent fifteenth-century Roman Catholic ecclesiastics to be buried in a floor tomb: Nicholas V was buried under a floor slab before the altar of St Nicholas in the north aisle of St Peter's. The slab was modest in appearances and marked by an inscription in the wall. Calixtus III was also laid to rest underground at his death in 1458. The oratory of S. Andrea in the rotunda of S. Maria della Febbre on the north flank of the basilica was the site of the burial, and a monument to the pope was later erected by his nephew Rodrigo Borgia. Cardinals too were treated in this manner after death: Nicholas of Cusa was buried under a floor slab before the altar in his titular church of S. Pietro in Vincoli in Rome. The altar was also commissioned by the cardinal as a commemorative piece and shows Nicholas being presented to St Peter by an angel.<sup>80</sup>

In the tradition of many cardinals and prominent men and women in Italian society, Bessarion also made a request in his will for masses to be said in his honour on the anniversary of his death:

I order and arrange for the said friars to say a mass every day, and to say a mass for the dead on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays including my name while I am living and after I am

---

<sup>80</sup> Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome*, 357-61.



dead as well as Isidore and Bishop Dositheos, Theodore and Theodora and others whom I have in mind..<sup>81</sup>

Bessarion's means to endow such services indicate his status in Italian society. Italian notables as illustrious as Francesco Gonzaga (1466-1519) frequently made endowments for the celebration of requiem masses for their soul and other ways of marking the anniversary of their death..<sup>82</sup>

Bessarion clearly had a political agenda in arranging the obsequies for himself. Funerary monuments and orations situated the cardinal in the apostolic hierarchy and commemorated his connection with the pope in his lifetime. The dead man was to have a position in the Church which existed in perpetuity..<sup>83</sup> In Bessarion's case this position was established by a funeral oration, which Niccolò Capranica delivered in 1472, emphasising the cardinal's role within the Curia..<sup>84</sup> Further evidence of the important position Bessarion held in the hierarchy, even after death, can be found in the attendance of Sixtus IV at his funeral – an honour not frequently granted to a cardinal. In addition, it is arguable that the chapel elevated Bessarion's political profile in Rome during his lifetime. This can be seen in the possible links with Guillaume d'Estouteville's chapel mentioned above. If Meredith Gill's argument is accepted, then Bessarion was placing his chapel within a pilgrimage circuit in honour of St Michael based in Rome. By doing so he was associating himself with the powerful French cardinal and the important church of S. Maria Maggiore.

---

<sup>81</sup> See appendix, 231-38. Isidore was the Russian Orthodox colleague of Bessarion who was also made a cardinal by Eugenius IV. Dositheos was Bessarion's former tutor and mentor, while Theodore and Theodora are thought to be the names of the cardinal's parents.

<sup>82</sup> Gonzaga endowed a canonry at Mantua Cathedral to celebrate requiem masses for his soul. He also requested that on the anniversary of his death a procession would be held at vespers from the cathedral to the church of S. Francesco and then again at matins the following day to celebrate a mass at his tomb. Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome*, 447.

<sup>83</sup> Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome*, 318.

<sup>84</sup> 'Apud quem, ut tu, beatissime pater, nosti, Nicaenus valuit auctoritate et gratia. Verum ingravescente senio et morbis ad honestum otium sese referre statuit.' Acta in Funere Nicaeni per Nicolaum Episcopum Firmamum, printed in Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 405-14. Here Capranica implies that Bessarion's reduced role in the pontificate of Paul II was the result of the pope's concern for the cardinal's state of health.

The themes of death and the fate of the soul continue in the iconography of the second scene in the upper register of the S. Eugenia chapel. The iconography of the second scene in the upper register, which shows St Aubert's procession to Monte Tumba (Figures 11-13), may have had a double interpretation. Apart from representing the miraculous episode with St Michael, the procession may echo Bessarion's own obsequies.<sup>85</sup> The group bearing candles, accompanied by singing monks and led by the bishop could also be read as the depiction of a funeral procession.<sup>86</sup> Behind the bishop are two figures whose faces have been identified as portraits of Giuliano and Francesco della Rovere.<sup>87</sup> Francesco, in particular, was a close friend of the cardinal and a major patron of the Franciscans. Was Bessarion anticipating the attendance of Francesco as Sixtus IV at the cardinal's burial rites when the chapel was painted in the 1460s? The semi dome of the chapel depicts the celestial kingdom into which the soul will be received. The entire fresco scheme portrays the destination of the cardinal's soul after death via the agent St Michael the Archangel. Here Bessarion and the other souls for whom the monks were to pray would meet Christ presiding over his heavenly court. Death was the preoccupying theme in this chapel – in its designation as Bessarion's place of rest; in the specifications for the treatment of his body and his memory; and in the decorative scheme on the walls. However the association with St Michael is not straightforward. He was not represented in his traditional guise as the weigher of souls or the judge of the dead. Bessarion's choice of the bull episodes did not undermine St Michael's link in the chapel of S. Eugenia with life after death but nuanced it and enabled the cardinal to convey a host of messages through the experience of his chapel.

## Artist Attribution

---

<sup>85</sup> Interpreting the iconographic scheme in this way could be an argument for proposing that the frescoes were executed after Bessarion's death. For a host of reasons that will be explored below (see p. 97), I do not believe that this alternative theory can be supported by the evidence.

<sup>86</sup> See appendix, 231-38.

<sup>87</sup> Claudia Haas, 'A proposito degli affreschi', 136.

According to documentary evidence, Cardinal Bessarion commissioned Antoniazio Romano.<sup>88</sup> to paint the frescoes in the chapel of S. Eugenia between 1464 and 1465. However, the extant contracts between the cardinal and the painter do not describe the narrative scenes which Malvasia refers to and which can be seen in the upper register where the stories of St Michael in the guise of a bull have been depicted. These omissions have led some scholars to question whether Antoniazio was responsible for the whole commission or even whether the apse wall was painted at a later date under the patronage of an associate of Bessarion, such as his secretary Niccolò Perotti.<sup>89</sup> It is important to engage with this theory to demonstrate that, on the contrary, it was Bessarion who was the likely patron for the entire cycle and was thus responsible for the iconographic scheme and the choice of painter.

Among those who doubt that Antoniazio was the chapel's artist is the art historian Fabrizio Lollini who has written about the chapel in SS Apostoli in a PhD thesis and in an article for *Arte cristiana*.<sup>90</sup> He proposes that the ceiling and narrative registers were commissioned by Niccolò Perotti from Lorenzo da Viterbo at some point between 1467 and 1472. This would require a significant reinterpretation of both Bessarion's relationship with the chapel and the significance of the iconography to the patron, but the iconographical and stylistic evidence raises questions about this hypothesis. The theory is based on a stylistic comparison of Lorenzo da Viterbo's Mazzatosta Chapel in S. Maria della Verità, Viterbo with the scenes in the St Michael legend. According to the art historian, Perotti's position as Archbishop of Siponto (1458-80) gave him the motivation to commission a fresco in which the Siponto cleric features so prominently. Lollini's idea depends on relating both scenes with the bull in the upper register to the Monte Gargano story. If the second scene of the upper register depicted the procession led by the bishop of Siponto to the foot of Monte

---

<sup>88</sup> Scholarship on Antoniazio Romano began with Corvisieri's 1869 article, 'Antonazo Aquilio Romano', whose work was summarized by Everett in the *American Archaeology Journal* in the article, 'Antoniazzo Romano'. For an in-depth study of the artist Antoniazio Romano see Hedberg's thesis, 'Antoniazzo Romano and His School'.

<sup>89</sup> Lollini's theory is presented in his article, 'Il Cardinale Bessarione e le arte figurative'; and in idem, 'La Capella di Bessarione ai santi Apostoli'. Haas develops this theory in the article, 'A proposito degli affreschi'.

<sup>90</sup> Lollini, 'Il Cardinale Bessarione e le arte figurative', and idem, 'La Cappella di Bessarione ai santi Apostoli'.

Gargano, as Clemente Busiri-Vici surmised, then the iconography might have special resonance with Perotti in his guise as bishop of that see. However, the inscription identifying the second scene as Monte Tumba makes it clear that the viewer is not looking at a second chapter in the Gargano story. Lollini's attribution depends heavily on Niccolò Perotti's involvement. While a secretary to Bessarion, he lived in Viterbo between 1464-69 as papal rector and may have at this time established a link with Lorenzo da Viterbo. According to this theory, the prominence of the bishop, whom Lollini has identified as Siponto in the frescoes, and the absence of a direct representation of Bessarion render the theme of the decoration more relevant to Perotti as the Sipontan bishop. In addition, Lollini's hypothesis does not account for the documentary evidence, in the form of the instructions to Antoniazio, which relates the chapel commission to Bessarion and the lack of documents that might relate it to Perotti.

As for the attribution to Lorenzo da Viterbo, a close examination of the style in the Mazzatosta Chapel suggests that the artist who painted it was not present in the chapel of S. Eugenia. A brief comparison of the way in which faces are rendered demonstrates different hands at work. The group of Apostles who look up at the Ascension of the Virgin in the Mazzatosta Chapel have bulbous noses, smooth cheeks, furrowed brows and creases around the eyes (Figure 25). In contrast the faces of the figures in the procession at Monte Tumba in Bessarion's chapel are notable for their straight noses and lined cheeks. (Figure 26) The work by Lorenzo da Viterbo is more naturalistic with its softer lines, although the hands in Antoniazio's work seem to be more anatomically convincing. Drapery is differently rendered in the two chapels - in Viterbo it is even more elaborate and sculptural, with light and shade defining deep folds (Figure 27) compared to that in Bessarion's chapel (Figure 28). Stylistically there does not seem to be any reason to suppose that Lorenzo da Viterbo painted the legends of St Michael in Bessarion's chapel.

Claudia Haas in her article for *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte* has also addressed the issue of stylistic attribution of the chapel frescoes.<sup>91</sup> In her argument the chapel has been frescoed in two distinct styles: one in the semi dome decoration of the angelic hierarchy and the other in the wall scenes of St Michael, which must be attributed to at least two different hands. Haas points to the contrast between the angels depicted in the ceiling with their schematized facial features and the lively portraits in the wall scenes, where the painter has realised the faces with a strong degree of plasticity rendered by the fall of light and shadow on their features. By comparing Melozzo da Forlì's head of Giuliano della Rovere in the Vatican with the one in the Legend of St Michael, she concludes that it is possible that Melozzo was the artist who worked on the narrative scenes in Bessarion's chapel. In her opinion Melozzo's heads are characterised by their introversion and isolation despite their placement in a group scenario, and these features are also present in the foreground figures of the upper right-hand panel which depicts the procession at Monte Tumba.<sup>92</sup> While it can be argued that different artists were at work in the semi dome and on the walls, we know that Antoniazio ran an extensive workshop and that this is likely to account for discrepancies in style. There are many elements in the decorative scheme of this chapel that seem to belong to the hand of Antoniazio when the work is compared with other projects that we know he executed. By comparing the St Michael scenes with only those works documented and signed by Antoniazio, it becomes clearer that the same hand or workshop executed the ceiling with the angelic hierarchy as well as the scenes from the Miracles of St Michael.

Particularly distinctive in all these works by Antoniazio are the strong chins, creases in the cheeks and shading that looks like stubble on the faces of the prominent men. It is evident in St Anthony of Padua on the right-hand wing of a triptych at S. Francesco, Subiaco (signed and dated 1467) (Figure 29). The saints in a panel of the Madonna and Child with Saints Paul and Francis of Assisi in the Barberini Gallery (signed) have beards but the wrinkles and the strong lines are still visible (Figure 30). Even the

---

<sup>91</sup> Haas, 'A proposito degli affreschi'.

<sup>92</sup> Haas, 'A proposito degli affreschi', 134-36.

diminutive Cardinal Torquemada in the Annunciation panel in S. Maria sopra Minerva (dated and documented 1499-1500; Figure 31) has a slight shading round his chin. Less striking, but equally consistent is the palette with its deep blues and reds which can be seen in the clothing of the figures in each of these works. While not as sculptural as that executed by Lorenzo da Viterbo, the drapery is nonetheless complex with deep folds that model the anatomical forms which they cover, particularly in the mantle of St Paul in the Barberini panel; the robes of the Franciscans in the Subiaco altarpiece; and the clothing worn by the figures in the Monte Tumba procession.

A variation on the argument that Antoniazzo did not paint the whole chapel is that he worked on the semi dome several years before he began the St Michael cycle and that there is a significant change reflected in two separate campaigns..<sup>93</sup> This hypothesis deserves consideration since it could support Lollini's theory that more than one patron was responsible for the frescoes and that the later campaign occurred after Bessarion's death. If the figures of the angels in the hierarchy are compared with those who feature in the miracle scenes there are a few differences which can be identified. The faces of the angels are blander and their rendering is more two-dimensional than their human counterparts below. This is not necessarily evidence that there were several campaigns separated by substantial time frames. These discrepancies can probably be accounted for by the nature of the subject and the methods of working in fifteenth-century artistic practice. It is known that Antoniazzo produced art that was very ethereal and sought to inhabit a more divine space. This is evident in the gold backgrounds, in which his holy figures seem to hover, that he used in several works attributed to him, including the Barberini and Subiaco altarpieces as well as the icons he executed throughout his career (Figure 32). (In addition the semi dome was decorated with a host of angels, and homogeneity might be expected among ranks of non-human bodies. Antoniazzo ran a sizeable workshop.<sup>94</sup> so the work on the angels may have been delegated since it was less complicated than the rendering of individual characters on

---

<sup>93</sup> Lollini, 'Il Cardinale Bessarione e le arte figurative', and idem, 'La Cappella di Bessarione ai santi Apostoli'.

<sup>94</sup> Hedberg, 'Antoniazzo and his School', 54.

the wall as well as being less visible to the naked eye. Finally, the inconsistencies seem to be over-emphasised when comparing the upper register with the semi dome. The drapery of the angels, the linear quality of their forms and the use of light and shade make these figures entirely compatible with Antoniazzo's oeuvre and do not justify explanations of a radical shift in style.

Having established that it was Antoniazzo Romano whom Bessarion commissioned for the chapel of S. Eugenia, it becomes necessary to ask why he chose this particular painter. If it is the case that Bessarion was actually seeking an Italian artist for his commission rather than a Greek, as discussed above,<sup>95</sup> then it is worthwhile dwelling on why he chose this particular Italian. Rome in the 1450s and 1460s was dominated by many established painters from Tuscany and Umbria attracted to the city by projects at the papal court. For example, Piero della Francesca was brought to Rome by Nicholas V and then worked on Pius II's rooms in the Vatican in 1459. But the cardinal chose Antoniazzo Romano for the most important artistic commission of his life: his burial chapel. From today's perspective this preference seems perplexing as Antoniazzo does not have a high profile in the art-historical canon in comparison with his Tuscan colleagues. However, among his contemporaries Antoniazzo was not so easily dismissed. He was the leading Roman painter in Rome. His patrons included Paul II, and to use one of the pope's painters must have transferred a degree of glory to the cardinal by association. The bull granting Bessarion permission to decorate his chapel, was after all, re-issued by Paul II. A further motivating force may have been the local character of Antoniazzo's workshop. Bessarion may have been championing 'Romanness' in an effort to cultivate his own identity as a Roman patron, a sponsor of local talent in the way the Medici supported Florentine artists. Signed and documented works by Antoniazzo are predominantly panel paintings, while fresco cycles attributed to him were executed later in his career (for example, the apse in S. Croce in Gerusalemme, 1485-90 or the Camera di S. Caterina in S. Maria di sopra Minerva), making the frescoes at S. Eugenia among the earliest known by

---

<sup>95</sup> This suggestion that I have put forward about Bessarion's deliberate choice of a western craftsman is discussed in the introduction (p. 2) and above (p. 55).

the artist. This raises the question of whether Bessarion knew examples of his wall paintings that are no longer extant or whether this was a radical commission with which the cardinal offered Antoniazzo an opportunity to execute a fresco programme for the first time.

Antoniazzo's work is often deemed conservative which provokes speculation that Bessarion deliberately chose a more traditional painter. By considering the style of the frescoes and their iconography, it is hard to maintain this conclusion. Certainly Antoniazzo was capable of producing work with a 'medieval', ethereal character but there seems to be little evidence of this in the chapel. Figures have monumentality, some of the faces have a convincing portrait-like individuality and efforts have been made at rendering perspective. Stylistically, the angels in their nine choirs are more static and unreal but the iconography represented current philosophical thinking in the Italian Renaissance in its engagement with Neoplatonism. It is difficult to conclude that this project was shaped by any conservative motivation on the part of Bessarion. Evidently the cardinal wanted the most up-to-date western appearance for his burial chapel.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that Cardinal Bessarion's burial chapel in SS Apostoli was a statement of his assimilation into western culture expressed in the narrative iconography and Italian stylistic idiom of the decorative programme. Bessarion's chapel of S. Eugenia reflects the Roman Catholic side of the cardinal's identity. It is characterised by western rather than Greek traditions and has more in common with the chapel of the Cardinal d'Estouteville than with that of Theodore Metochites. It follows papal, not imperial, models. Bessarion's commission was given to an Italian painter who worked in a Roman stylistic idiom to depict a western iconographical programme. The project reflected the agenda of a western European cardinal, not a Greek monk.



The only Greek feature in the chapel was the icon on the altar which depicted the Madonna Hodegetria and formed part of the salvatory/redemptive dialogue of the chapel's decorative scheme. It was painted by Antoniazio Romano to look like a 'Greek' icon, and it raises many questions. Is its presence purely a reflection of the popularity of icons in fifteenth-century Rome? Did it hold more significance for Bessarion as a concession to his Greek heritage in this western, Italian programme? Why did he choose a Roman artist and not a Cretan painter (Crete was a major exporter of icons and Bessarion had many links there)? Why did he not donate one of his 'original' panels from his collection for such an important commission? The fresco programme in S. Eugenia is clearly sourced and styled in a western environment, however the phenomenon of the icon is an even more complex and layered issue. The questions it provokes will be addressed and considered in the following chapter.

### Chapter 3: Cardinal Bessarion's Icons and Reliquaries

Cardinal Bessarion commissioned, collected and donated icons throughout the course of his Italian career. He is known to have donated seven icons in mosaic to St Peter's between 1462 and 1467 (and an inventory of 1489 documents further donations that the cardinal made during his lifetime).<sup>1</sup> He gave an icon of the Madonna and Child to the Abbey of Grottaferrata and was responsible for the establishment of a Marian cult there. And he was generous in his support of the existing icon at Bologna while he was apostolic legate to the city. Anna Cavallaro considers Bessarion to be one of the catalysts in a revived interest in icons in Rome during the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will look at these practices in the context of the increasing popularity of icons in the Latin West during the quattrocento and it will assess Bessarion's contribution and reaction to this growing esteem for Byzantine artefacts.<sup>3</sup> Paradoxical though it might seem, I will argue that the cardinal's promotion of the Byzantine arts was angled to respond to his Roman environment. By commissioning Italian artists to produce icons for his personal use where he could so easily have acquired Greek icons from Cretan artists, for example, and by encouraging the western fascination for all things Greek, Bessarion was conforming to current fashions in the fifteenth-century European culture for collecting religious art.

To date studies of Bessarion and his icons have considered the collection to be a uniquely Greek phenomenon that proves that the cardinal was immersed in his Byzantine culture and unassimilated to his Roman context. I am suggesting that, on the contrary, he was a patron of Italian artists' efforts to create icons in a western idiom. His icon commissions for the decoration of public spaces and his

---

<sup>1</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 107. Nagel and Wood cite E. Muntz and A.L. Frothingham, *Il Tesoro della Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano*, Rome 1883, 111-12.

<sup>2</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 107.

<sup>3</sup> Cavallaro, 'Antoniazio Romano e le confraternite', 343-46. In this article Cardinal Pietro Barbo is also credited with an important role in the revival of Italian interest in 'yconae graecae'. See Muntz, 'La Renaissance à la cour des papes. Les Collections du Cardinal Pierre Barbo (Paul II)', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 16 (1877), 98-104. More recently Rembrandt Duits has written on Cardinal Barbo's collection in "'Una Icona Pulcra". The Byzantine Icons of Cardinal Pietro Barbo'.

donations to institutions and contemporaries served political ends that ultimately endorsed the cardinal's position and reputation in his western environment.

This chapter will portray Bessarion as a political creature who adapted to his new environment enthusiastically and readily. The phenomenon of icon collecting, as it manifested itself in the West, was a practice that Bessarion encouraged and manipulated. His choice of Antoniazio Romano to paint his personal icon in the chapel of S. Eugenia speaks volumes about his acceptance of the Roman artistic interpretation of this Byzantine medium in the West. It will be demonstrated here that this absorption of an Italian cultural vocabulary was another element in Bessarion's evolving Latin identity.

### **The Madonna of the Holy Conception, SS. Apostoli**

It is significant that the main icon with which Bessarion is associated is not a Byzantine painting but a work executed by an Italian artist for the cardinal's burial chamber.<sup>4</sup> Today, as the visitor enters SS Apostoli, this icon of the Virgin and Child can be found in the chapel of the Holy Conception (once the chapel of the Archconfraternity of St Anthony of Padua), the first on the right of the nave or on the south wall (Figure 33). After Bessarion's chapel was sealed, the icon was used by the Chapel of the Archconfraternity of St Anthony and later moved to its current position. That this is the Madonna and Child which was situated in the chapel of S. Eugenia was confirmed by Clemente Busiri-Vici in 1959 when he discovered that the dimensions of the panel matched those of the burial chapel aedicule in the centre of the apse wall's lower register.<sup>5</sup> By the seventeenth century the painting had been appropriated by the Confraternity of the Holy Conception as the altarpiece for their chapel. This was recorded in the 'Visitatio Ecclesiae Sanctorum Apostolorum Die 28 Octobris 1625', which reads:

---

<sup>4</sup> Cavallaro, 'Il rinnovato culto delle icone nella Roma del Quattrocento', 286. The icon is mentioned in Malvasia, *Compendio storico*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> Busiri-Vici, 'Un ritrovamento eccezionale', 81-82. The transfer of the icon to the chapel of the archconfraternity happened on 28 January 1654 (Archivio del Convento dei SS. Apostoli, Libri dei Consigli 1633-1665, ff. 127v-128). This document is cited in Noehles, *Antoniazzo Romano*, 226.

‘Once this was the altar under the Invocation of St Eugenia, now indeed [it is] of the Holiest Conception...’<sup>6</sup>

The Madonna and Child are depicted on a gold background decorated with a foliate pattern painted to look like gold cloth. Mary is seated and shown in three-quarter length, her body turned slightly to her left and her head inclined. She wears a simple blue mantle with a gold-embroidered trim and a red tunic underneath. The Christ Child is seated on her lap, held in her left arm while she gestures to him with her right hand in a typical Hodegetria pose. He is a miniature youth holding a globe in his left hand and making a gesture of blessing with his right.

Although it is evident that the artist could produce paintings that embodied the medieval, archaic formula of an icon, he nonetheless maintained a quattrocento flavour in this work. It is an interpretation rather than a slavish copy of a Greek panel. The faces of the Madonna and Child are smooth and more realistic than the schematized features of many Byzantine figures. In Bessarion’s panel the bodies have volume and substance, and the figure sizes are proportionate in relation to each other. The artist has also rendered the drapery in the naturalistic fashion typical of fifteenth-century Roman art.

The SS Apostoli icon is an interesting phenomenon in Cardinal Bessarion’s cultural patronage. A fifteenth-century Roman painter executed a form of art recognised as Greek, in a style which was a western interpretation of the Byzantine. What were Bessarion’s motives in commissioning this hybrid? He did not lack for opportunities to hire native Greek craftsmen either through his various connections scattered throughout Byzantium or in Rome itself. Byzantine-crafted icons were available in the West,

---

<sup>6</sup> ‘Est altare olim sub Invocatione Sanctae Eugeniae, nunc vero Sanctissima Conceptionis...’ Report of the apostolic visit in ASV, S. Congr. Visita Apostolica, Acta vol. II, 1624, fol. 371; cited in Tiberia, *Antoniazio Romano*, doc. 9, 123. Translated from the Latin by Laura Bolick.

and it is hard to imagine that Bessarion did not have access to these.<sup>7</sup> In his article on the icon collection of the Medici family, Rembrandt Duits highlights references to Greek panels owned by prominent Italians in the fifteenth century, such as Cardinals Ludovico Trevisan (1401-65) and Francesco Gonzaga (1443-83).<sup>8</sup> Non-Greek patrons who were contemporaries of Bessarion could clearly obtain Byzantine icons, implying that it was unlikely that the cardinal was limited by issues of expediency when he chose an Italian artist to execute his chapel icon.

Bessarion also had active links to the Aegean islands where he could have accessed Greek craftsmen. Crete was a major outpost of the fifteenth-century icon industry and supplied the Byzantine and western markets,<sup>9</sup> and the cardinal is known to have had connections on the island. The most famous was Michael Apostolis, Bessarion's protégé who fled Constantinople to establish himself on Crete as a teacher. Cardinal Bessarion had other associates in Crete among the Greek refugees, and acquired many of his books through the island.<sup>10</sup> Yet he chose not to employ a Greek painter for his icon in the chapel of S. Eugenia, hiring a local Roman instead.

Cretan trade demonstrates that there was a clear distinction and a clear demand for icons *alla maniera greca* (in a Palaeologan idiom) and *alla maniera latina* (with recognisable Venetian gothic motifs).<sup>11</sup>

The Greek style was characterised primarily by the Madonna's aloofness while the *maniera latina* was recognised, among other signs, by motifs such as decorative details on the Christ Child's shirt and a

<sup>7</sup> Chatzidakis, *Da Candia a Venezia*, 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Duits, 'Byzantine Icons in the Medici Collection', 169-70.

<sup>9</sup> Document 6 in Cattapan, 'Nuovi Elenchi', 211: Notaio Giorgio Cumno, ASV, *Notai di Candia*, b. 31, f. 191v. 'A di IIII luio. Manifesto da maestro Migiel Fuca depentor, con li soi heredi, a ser Giorgio Basejo et ser Petro Varsama et a li soi heredi perché dito maestro Migiel promete lavorar et apatar a le infrascrite incone de la ymago de la nostra Dona numero cento de prima sorta, la mità con vestimenti de turchin brocà d'oro et l'altra mità color de pavonaço brocà d'oro secondo la forma del la mostra (che) dito maestro Migiel à dato a li diti, da mo' in fin a di 15 avosto proximo...Item, el dito maestro Migiel promete nel dito termeno dar a li diti d'altre incone numero cento de prima, seconda e terça sorta a quela forma che avrà lavorà maestro Nicolò Gripioti.'

<sup>10</sup> See chapter 4 in the present dissertation.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of Cretan icons see Angeliki Lymberopoulou's chapter 'Audiences and Markets for Cretan Icons' in *Viewing Renaissance Art*. She also cites M. Chatzidakis's chapter, 'La Peinture des "Madonneri" ou "vénéto-creteoise" et sa destination' in *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente (secoli XV-XVI): Aspetti e problemi*, Florence 1977, 673-90.

jewelled brooch fastening Mary's *maphorion* or mantle.<sup>12</sup> Artists clearly could adapt their style to match the tastes of clients, suggesting at least a subconscious distinction in contemporary minds between Greek and Latin icons. If artists and clients perceived a difference in style then it is possible to hypothesize that Bessarion had very specific western intentions when he commissioned a Roman artist to execute his major commission.

The Cretan notary Giorgio Cumno has left evidence of the divide between Greek and Latin tastes in icon style. On 18 May 1499 he recorded that an M. Foca hired an artist called Tajapiera for two months because he could paint seven Madonna faces per day.<sup>13</sup> On 4 July 1499 a huge order of seven hundred Marian icons from G. Basejo of Venice and P. Varsamà of Morea was made. They commissioned the artist Foca to prepare two hundred of them: fifty with a mantle 'turchino' or blue and fifty with a 'pavonazzo' or purple mantle embroidered in gold and a hundred *in forma a la latina*.<sup>14</sup> In the same document of July 1499, another artist, Gripioti took on three hundred in the Latin style while Mizocostantin was to do the final two hundred: half in the Latin manner and half in the Greek. Clearly the craftsman was not only able to distinguish a difference between the two traditions but to execute them accordingly.

Bessarion's choice of artist is a significant element in establishing the extent to which he was pursuing a western agenda through this commission. The panel is usually attributed to Antoniazio Romano and dated to between 1467 (the date of the completion of the fresco cycle in the chapel of S. Eugenia) and 1472 (Bessarion's death). Although the work is neither signed nor dated, art historians have attributed

---

<sup>12</sup> Post-Byzantine Cretan art was characterised by its hybrid nature which manifested itself in iconographic tropes that reflected western and Byzantine influences as well as stylistic traits which drew on both traditions. For a full discussion of these interwoven elements see Lymberopoulou, 'Audiences and Markets for Cretan Icons', esp. 171-73; 189-90.

<sup>13</sup> This contract is analysed in Lymberopoulou, 'Audiences and Markets for Cretan Icons', 171-206. Document 4 in Cattapan, 'Nuovi Elenchi', 211: Notaio Giorgio Cumno, ASV, *Notai di Candia*, b. 31, f. 178v.

<sup>14</sup> Document 7 in Cattapan, 'Nuovi Elenchi', 211: Notaio Giorgio Cumno, ASV, *Notai di Candia*, b. 31, f. 191v.

it to Antoniazio Romano since the early twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> It should be acknowledged that some art historians have subsequently disputed this conclusion. Gregory Hedberg reattributed it to the workshop from 1490,<sup>16</sup> and in one of his articles Fabrizio Lollini follows Hedberg by casting doubt on this attribution, arguing that it is more likely to be by a follower of Antoniazio, executed at a later date.<sup>17</sup> However Francesco Negri Arnoldi's assertion in 1964 that the artist was Antoniazio Romano and that the date of execution was the year of Bessarion's death seems more convincing. He based his theory on Herbert Everett's identification of the artist in his article 'Antoniazio Romano' published in 1907. Everett has convincingly argued for the attribution of the icon to Antoniazio, commenting that the Virgin type, the treatment of the skin without light and shade modulations, and the shape of the hands were consistent with the painter's oeuvre.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to establish that the artist was indeed Antoniazio or his circle because this will advance the thesis that Bessarion deliberately chose not only a western, but also a specifically Roman painter. A visual comparison of icons confirmed to be by Antoniazio with the S. Eugenia Madonna and Child supports the theory that it was Antoniazio or his workshop who painted this panel. For example, in the Cathedral of Velletri, outside Rome Antoniazio signed and dated an icon of the Madonna and Child, which he painted for the altar of the Chapel of Conception in 1486 (Figure 34).<sup>19</sup> This was a votive image executed for the local state to end a plague which hit Velletri during 1483-86. It was a free interpretation of the icon of S. Agostino which was said to have come from Constantinople and which

<sup>15</sup> Everett, 'Antoniazio Romano', 295-96; Busiri Vici, 'Un ritrovamento eccezionale', 81-82; Negri Arnoldi, 'Madonne giovanile' 211, n. 11; Noehles, *Antoniazio Romano*, 225, n. 80; Hedberg, 'Antoniazio Romano and his School', 219-20.

<sup>16</sup> For the various date attributions see Negri Arnoldi, 'Madonne giovanili di Antoniazio', 211, n. 11; Hedberg, *Antoniazio Romano*, 219-20, n. 91; and Cavallaro, *Antoniazio e gli antoniazzeschi*, 184-5.

<sup>17</sup> Lollini, 'La cappella di Bessarione ai Santi Apostoli', 21-22 (note).

<sup>18</sup> Everett, 'Antoniazio Romano', 295-96.

<sup>19</sup> The inscription is painted on a white board at the feet of the Virgin and reads:

Dira Lues olim contagio dira Velitras  
Bis tribus aggressa est. Idibus heu pietas  
Alma sed ut rediit Conceptio Mense Decembris  
Reginam votis quisque adiere piis  
Hinc propere cessit contagio que ira deorum  
Quod posito templo picta tabella docet  
Antoniatus Romanus pinxit MCCCCLXXXVI

was processed through Rome in 1485 to counter an outbreak of plague there..<sup>20</sup> The full length figures of the Madonna and Child deviate from Byzantine prototypes, but the ethereal gold background and rigid, hieratic pose situate this panel within Antoniazzo's icon repertoire. Facial features are bland and there is little modulation of light and shade, rendering the faces very two-dimensional. These deliberately archaizing techniques reveal that a western artist was imitating the Greek style, if not actually copying a prototype.

Everett also noted the similarities between the patterned background in Bessarion's work with another work by Antoniazzo, the *Madonna della Rota*, which is similarly decorated (Figure 35)..<sup>21</sup> Clearly the stylistic traits of this icon conform to the traditions of Antoniazzo's oeuvre, linking this Madonna and Child to a Roman (not a Greek) artist, commissioned by Bessarion.

By commissioning this particular icon, Bessarion was associating himself with Antoniazzo, whom Hans Belting has described as 'the official copyist of old Roman and Greek icons'..<sup>22</sup> It has been suggested that Bessarion was actually trying to use a local artist who worked in a style that was as close as he could get to an authentic Byzantine panel rather than looking to have a western style for his commission. While this is possible, the ready availability to Italians of icons originating in Byzantium, combined with Bessarion's many connections with pools of refugee craftsman leaves this theory open to the counter-argument that he did in fact want a westernized look to his commissioned icon.

Traditionally the S. Eugenia project is perceived by art historians to be a statement of the cardinal's Greekness set in a chapel embedded in the religious centre of the West. But something more subtle was being communicated through this icon commission. Bessarion seemed to have aspired to own an icon

---

<sup>20</sup> A Roman nobleman, Clemente di Giovanni Toscanella, gave the icon to Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville who was also bishop of Velletri from 1483. The cardinal was the likely source of the cult of the Madonna of S. Agostino in Velletri. Cavallaro, 'Il rinnovato culto delle icone', 290. For more on Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville at Velletri see A. Borgia, *Istoria della chiesa e città di Velletri*, Nocera 1723, 384-85.

<sup>21</sup> Everett, 'Antoniazzo Romano', 295-96.

<sup>22</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 442. Antoniazzo's career as an icon painter is discussed in more depth below.



that was executed in Antoniazzo's manner, an artist who was producing this manner of work for prominent church patrons in Rome and its environs. By championing this local artistic vocabulary, Bessarion's action resulted in another step towards integration in the local environment. Antoniazzo's earliest signed icon was the Madonna di Rieti which was painted in 1464. Negri Arnoldi and Hedberg argue that between this date and 1470 Antoniazzo acquired a reputation as a painter of devotional images for the public commissions of Franciscan monasteries, confraternities, provincial lords and cardinals (especially Greek and Spanish).<sup>23</sup> His workshop produced multiple copies of the most famous icons in Rome and its outskirts. It was believed that seven paintings of the Madonna and Child by the hand of St Luke still existed, and four of these (the Salus Populi of S. Maria Maggiore, the Madonna dell'Aracoeli, the Madonna di S. Maria del Popolo, and the Theotokos of the Abbey of Grottaferrata) were in the regions in and around Rome.<sup>24</sup> The S. Maria del Popolo icon was particularly popular, and there are extant copies by Antoniazzo's workshop in the Parrish Museum, Southampton,<sup>25</sup> in various American private collections, in the Museo Capitolare next to the church of S. Francesco, Amelia,<sup>26</sup> and in the Turin sanctuary of the Consolata.<sup>27</sup>

We know that Antoniazzo worked with prestigious patrons such as Alessandro Sforza who commissioned the artist in around 1470 to make copies of famous icons like that of S. Maria Maggiore, and it is proposed that Bessarion's commission to such a high profile artist reflected the behaviour of a high ranking Italian patron in fifteenth-century Rome, rather than that of a foreigner with an agenda to preserve his native customs. This particular icon for Sforza has not survived, but the duke's secretary recorded the inscription, which is now in a manuscript in the Biblioteca Angelica, Rome:

<sup>23</sup> See Negri Arnoldi, 'Madonne giovanili di Antoniazzo'; and Hedberg, *Antoniazzo Romano*.

<sup>24</sup> Cavallaro, 'Il rinnovato culto delle icone', 285. In 1464 a canon of S. Maria Maggiore, Giovanni Battista, wrote a treatise on the Madonna of St Luke in which he listed 7 existing images by the hand of the Evangelist. See BAV, cod. Vat.lat. 3921, f. 77. This treatise is published in P. De Angelis, *Basilicae S. Mariae Maioris de Urbe a Liberio Papa I usque Paulum V Pont. Max. descriptio et delineatio*, Rome 1621. 241-46.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of this panel see Cavallaro, *Antoniazzo Romano*, 217, cat. 48.

<sup>26</sup> The image is reproduced and attributed to Antoniazzo's workshop in F. Marcelli, 'Piermatteo d'Amelia e la "Liberalitis principis"', *Piermatteo d'Amelia. Pittura in Umbria meridionale fra '300 e '500*, Perugia 1996, 86, n. 163, tav. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Cavallaro, 'Il rinnovato culto delle icone', 288. These images all have the slanted, sunken eyes, the long nose and the pursed lips that are so characteristic of Antoniazzo.

In Rome there is the very holy image of the Virgin, once painted by St Luke. Who would dare to question the authenticity of St Luke's own work? I, the Roman painter Antoniazzo, have followed it in [my picture], and Alessandro Sforza has paid for the work..<sup>28</sup>

In this epigram, Antoniazzo forged a link between himself as the artist of this particular icon and St Luke, the painter of the prototype. Evidently the efficacy of the image, the glory of the copyist and the honour of the patron depended on establishing a connection with the Evangelist.

Antoniazzo also established a link with the papal court and became one of Paul II's official painters, a connection that may have made him a natural choice for Bessarion. In his administrative capacity, as *camerlengo* of the Gonfalone confraternity, Antoniazzo was required to maintain several of the most venerated images of the Virgin in Roman churches belonging to the association. Like the *Salus Populi Romani* in S. Maria Maggiore and the *Madonna of S. Aracoeli*, the icons that Antoniazzo took charge of were usually of Byzantine origin and dated from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, often alleged to be by the hand of St Luke..<sup>29</sup> By using the same painter as the pope, Bessarion was identifying himself with the practices of the highest level of western patronage.

Having established that a western artist, with a high status in Roman patronage circles, was commissioned to execute this project, it is also worth considering the heritage and mythology that the *Madonna and Child of S. Eugenia* generated. Antoniazzo later developed a reputation for producing miraculous *Madonnas* in Rome, but his work for Bessarion in the Chapel of S. Eugenia seems to have been misattributed quite early on. The prototype of the *S. Eugenia Madonna and Child* is uncertain. Icons had a heritage – all were supposedly copies of an original (the prototype) which could be traced

---

<sup>28</sup> 'Ad Mariam Maiorem Virginis est Rome quam Lucas pinxit imago tam sancta; errorem quis putet esse suam hanc? Antonatius pictor romanus ab illa duxit. Alexander Sfortia solvit opus.' Quoted in C. Corvisieri, 'Antoniazzo Romano pittore del secolo XV', 133; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 342. Translated from the Latin by Laura Bolick.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of Antoniazzo's involvement in the confraternity see Cavallaro, 'Antoniazzo e le confraternité', 335-65.

back to the very likeness of the subject itself (or in the case of icons of the Virgin and Child, to the portrait painted by the hand of St Luke). As John of Damascus commented when talking about icons, 'An image is a likeness depicting an archetype, but having some difference from it; the image is not like the archetype in every way.'<sup>30</sup> In the case of the icon in Bessarion's chapel, by the seventeenth century, in his account of SS Apostoli, the Franciscan friar Padre Malvasia was describing it as a work by the hand of St Luke himself, implying that the icon was considered to be of Byzantine origin from an early stage. It is clear from this description and from the position of the icon that he was referring to the work that was actually that commissioned by Bessarion from Antoniazio Romano:<sup>31</sup>

For the devotion he had to this Basilica, this very pious Cardinal wanted to enrich it with another precious treasure, which he had carried with him from Constantinople to Rome the very beautiful Image of the Mother of God, painted on panel, a modern writer would say that this painting is by Giacomo Vandi of Bologna; but common opinion maintains that Bessarion gave it to his devoted Basilica. By its antiquity this Image is clearly that which was painted by the Evangelist St Luke. (But I cannot confirm it). ...

Malvasia also records the inscription beneath the icon, which is still there today, and describes its current location, confirming that this is indeed Bessarion's commissioned work.

At the foot these words are written: *Concepta ulla labe*; and because this sacred Image remained inside a hollow wall behind the altar of the Chapel, the picture suffered from the great humidity. And few devotees went to visit it because of the obscurity of the site (as happened to the Image of the Glorious St Anthony of Padua, placed in the Altar of the Capotosti). So that they looked better, both Images were transferred to the new Chapel that of the lords of the Archconfraternity of the said St Anthony....<sup>32</sup> [where it can be seen today].

---

<sup>30</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, I:9.

<sup>31</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 110-11.

<sup>32</sup> 'Questo pietosissimo Cardinale per la devotione che havea à questa Basilica volle arricchirla d'un altro pretioso thesoro, che fù il portar seco da Constantinopoli à Roma la bellissima Imagine della Madre di Dio, dipinta in tavola, se bene un moderno scrittore vuole, che questa pittura sia di Giacomo Vandi Bolognese; la commune opinione però tiene, che la donasse il Bessarione à questa sua devota Basilica. Questa Imagine per la sua antichità

Malvasia's text is worth unravelling because it reveals some illuminating information about historical perceptions of Cardinal Bessarion's cultural identity. Firstly he states that the icon came from Constantinople despite his acknowledgement that 'modern writers' attribute it to a western artist from Bologna. Notwithstanding this admission that there was a western connection to this icon, Malvasia refers to the common belief that it was actually painted by St Luke.<sup>33</sup> The implication seems to be that, despite existing evidence to convince contemporary viewers that this was a western panel painted by a Bolognese artist, Malvasia preferred to associate it with Bessarion. And the friar seems to have made the assumption that a link with Bessarion meant the icon must have been Greek in origin. This misconception that the cardinal's cultural projects by default had a Byzantine identity emerged at a very early stage in the historiography. This is typical of the distortion in the historical approach to Bessarion that we see today.

Although defining differences between the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic functions of icons is challenging, some consideration of the role that the SS Apostoli icon played in Bessarion's chapel contributes to a picture of his agenda for the commission. The cardinal's icon of the Madonna was an aid to meditation and an intercessory vehicle between the viewer and God. This was a function that was entirely compatible with Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox theories. However, it is possible to interpret Bessarion's commission to Antoniazio in a way that seems to resonate strongly with the practices in Latin image veneration. The devotee would enter a dialogue with the icon and have an

---

ben dimostra esser di quelle dipinte dall'Evangelista S. Luca. (Io però non l'affermo). E' di grandezza palmi quattro, e di larghezza palmi sei, tiene il figliuolo in braccio, rendendo per la maestà del voto grandissima devotione, à piedi vi stanno scritte queste parole: Concepta absque ulla labe; e perche questa sacra Imagine stava incavata dentro muraglia, dietro all'Altare della Cappella, per il che per la grande humidità pativa la pittura, e per l'oscurità del luogo rendeva poca devotione, come il simile faceva la miracolosa Imagine del Glorioso S. Antonio di Padoa, posta nell'Altare de Capotosti, affinche fossero tenute con maggior decentia, l'una, e l'altra Imagine furno trasportate nella nova Cappella, che dalli signori dell'Arciconfraternità del medemo S. Antonio...', Malvasia, *Compendio Historico*, 36-40. Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>33</sup> There is a summary and interpretation of Bonaventura Malvasia's account in Noehles, *Antoniazzo Romano*, 225. Everett discusses the traditional theory that the icon was transferred from Constantinople by Bessarion in 'Antoniazzo Romano', 282. See also Howe, 'Miraculous Madonnas', 4.

expectation that by doing so his needs and wellbeing would be transmitted to God. In his study of icons in the western tradition, David Freedberg describes the act of meditation in *The Power of Images* as the act of dwelling on the humanness of the child and mother.<sup>34</sup> The helplessness, softness, beauty, and hints of suffering were the features on which meditation was focused. Antoniazzo's Madonna embodies this beauty, docility and tenderness in her delicate features and flawless prettiness. It could be argued that the artist's use of a western stylistic vocabulary enhanced this experience for the western viewer in Bessarion's chapel. In addition, icons were intended to generate protective feelings and parental love for the child and courtly love for the Virgin while at the same time conveying the Madonna's maternal role towards mankind. This was a western conceit, and Marina Warner, in her book on the western iconology of the Virgin, proposes that devotees felt themselves to be part of the Mother of God's brood in whose favour she turned her qualities of mercy, gentleness, indulgence, and forgiveness..<sup>35</sup>

Byzantine motives overlap these western ideas. For Bessarion this meditational exercise on the physical and material substance of the icon of the Madonna and Child may have had extra dimensions, one of which contributed to the overall message in the chapel of the journey of the soul after death. By dwelling on this image of the Hodegetria humankind ascends to the mental and finally to the spiritual realm. The anagogic function of the icon was to serve as a vehicle for the venerator to ascend to a higher spiritual plane. It should be noted that it is proposed in this thesis that a similar Pseudo-Dionysian metaphor was used in the angelic choir of the semi dome, discussed in Chapter 2. Although Pseudo-Dionysius was an eastern writer, the interest in his Platonic philosophies about the ascension of the soul in a Christian context was very much a fifteenth-century western phenomenon in which Bessarion participated on several levels.

---

<sup>34</sup> Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 167.

<sup>35</sup> Warner, *Alone of all her Sex*, 286.

Bessarion's inclusion of an icon of the Madonna and Child in a chapel devoted to St Michael was a practice that had some roots in the West. A link existed between the Italian cult of St Michael and the Marian icons. For instance, in Lecce at the Church of Michael the Archangel numerous devotees would worship once a week in the Chapel of the Madonna of Constantinople..<sup>36</sup> In these contexts the Virgin represented the Church militant as well as presiding over Ecclesia, defended by St Michael..<sup>37</sup> Closer to home, Bessarion's icon commission may have had a Roman-centric political purpose in its role as part of the cardinal's suggested collaboration with Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville..<sup>38</sup> The French cardinal too acquired Marian icons and had a particular devotion to the Archangel Michael. In his Roman church of S. Agostino, he obtained an icon of the Virgin and Child in the 1450s and commissioned the construction of a chapel dedicated to St Michael in the east end of the church. D'Estouteville also constructed another chapel dedicated to St Michael in S. Maria Maggiore, where he was the archpriest, which contained the scene of St Michael appearing over the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome. S. Maria Maggiore was renowned for its icon the *Salus Populi Romani*, a panel thought to have been painted by St Luke..<sup>39</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, it has been proposed by Meredith Gill that the chapels in SS Apostoli and S. Maria Maggiore represented a metaphorical pilgrimage route to the sites of St Michael's appearances: Gargano, Mont-Saint-Michel and Rome..<sup>40</sup> If that were the case then it would be natural that Bessarion would aspire to complete the comparison with S. Maria Maggiore by commissioning his own icon copied from a prototype that was also thought to have a divine pedigree. In this case, the cardinal's motivation had a specifically Roman focus: the elevation of the status of SS Apostoli to that of S. Maria Maggiore, one of the most important churches in Rome.

---

<sup>36</sup> Gill, "Where the Danger was Greatest", 516.

<sup>37</sup> Gill, "Where the Danger was Greatest", 516.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter 1 of the present dissertation.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of this icon, see Andaloro, 'L'Icona della Vergine "Salus Populi Romani"', 126-27.

<sup>40</sup> Gill, "Where the Danger was Greatest".

## S. Maria in Cosmedin

In 1927 the art historian Giovanni Battista Giovenale proposed that Cardinal Bessarion also commissioned a Roman painter to rework the icon that he donated to the Greek church in Rome, S. Maria in Cosmedin..<sup>41</sup> Giovenale wrote that the icon was a ‘work of the thirteenth century which was completely repainted in the late Renaissance’ (‘opera del XIII secolo completamente ridipinta nel tardo Rinascimento’)..<sup>42</sup> Few of the icon’s original thirteenth-century features survive, and the extant stylistic vocabulary used suggests that it was Antoniazio Romano who worked on it (Figure 36). Why did Bessarion commission a Roman painter to work on a Greek icon for a Greek church? The simple answer could be expediency: the cardinal was based in Rome, and a local painter would be the most readily available craftsman. But, as mentioned above, Bessarion had contacts in Greek territory including Crete, the foremost centre of icon manufacture. Yet he did not make use of these connections. These commissions were not made in haste – Bessarion had permission to redecorate the chapel and to embellish it from Pope Pius II in his bull of 1463 and the documentary evidence that the work was not carried out until 1467 suggests a four-year gestation period for the project which surely would have been plenty of time for overcoming the logistical complications of hiring a Byzantine artist. Instead, Bessarion chose an artist to work on the panel for S. Maria in Cosmedin who produced a western interpretation of a Greek idiom.

It could be argued that Bessarion had several reasons for choosing Antoniazio: for his status as a high profile artist, for his association with the production of miraculous Madonnas, and for his skill at executing a western interpretation of a Byzantine style. Nonetheless, there has been some debate over the identity of the fifteenth-century artist who reworked the S. Maria in Cosmedin panel. Carlo Bertelli posited that the icon had been reworked by an unknown artist *before* Bessarion commissioned his copy

---

<sup>41</sup> Giovenale, *La basilica di S. Maria in Cosmedin*. More recently Anna Cavallaro reinforced this conclusion in her work on Antoniazio Romano’s icon commissions, ‘Il rinnovato culto delle icone nella Roma del Quattrocento’, 287.

<sup>42</sup> Giovenale, *La basilica di S. Maria in Cosmedin*, 148-50.

for SS Apostoli..<sup>43</sup> Taking into account Bessarion's close links with S. Maria in Cosmedin..<sup>44</sup> which may well have disposed him to patronising an artistic project on their behalf, combined with the stylistic similarities of the icon with other works known to be by Antoniazzo, a strong case could be made that Bertelli ought not to have dismissed Bessarion and the Roman artist as the men behind the execution of the panel of the Virgin and Child. The decorative gold background in the icon is characteristic of other works by Antoniazzo such as the *Madonna and Child* in SS Apostoli, the panels of the *Madonna della Rota* in the Vatican apartments and of the *Annunciation with Cardinal Torquemada* in S. Maria sopra Minerva (Figure 31)..<sup>45</sup> The Virgin has the bland face and single line connecting eyebrow and nose, typical of other icons by Antoniazzo, which give the figures a remote and ethereal appearance. This was evidently deliberate since Antoniazzo was quite capable of painting the more naturalistic faces typical of contemporary Roman art, as is visible in the depiction of St Aubert in the right-hand upper panel on the chapel wall of S. Eugenia. The Virgin's left hand, which points to the Child, is large, and the little finger bends outwards in another feature typical of the Roman painter. By refashioning the icon in this archaizing manner, Antoniazzo may have been attempting to convey a sense of authenticity and accuracy which viewers identified as an 'old-fashioned' style..<sup>46</sup> The art historian Giovenale states that the style of this panel recalled that of the S. Maria del Popolo icon (Figure 37), which is clearly not the case..<sup>47</sup> The Child's facial features such as the shape of the nose are different, and the backgrounds are contrasting: in the icon belonging to the Greek church it is patterned while in the icon from S. Maria del Popolo it is plain gold.

Bessarion was participating in the fifteenth-century western phenomenon of 'renewing' icons. During this period Byzantine painted panels were being restored and 'improved'. The inscriptions on

---

<sup>43</sup> Bertelli, 'Icône di Roma', I, 106, n. 36.

<sup>44</sup> Nagel and Wood mention Bessarion's role in various Greek institutions in Italy including S. Maria in Cosmedin in Rome, which was also known as S. Maria in Schola Graeca. By 1433 this church had been given to the Benedictine Order, its tradition as a centre for expatriate Greeks who fled to Rome in the diaspora. Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 110-11.

<sup>45</sup> Cavallaro, 'Il rinnovato culto delle icône', 287. See also Cavallaro, *Antoniazzo Romano*, 218, cat. 52.

<sup>46</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 110-11.

<sup>47</sup> Giovenale, *La basilica di S. Maria in Cosmedin*, 148-50.



repainted icons often refer to the work as a 'renewal'. In their book *Anachronic Renaissance*, Nagel and Wood propose that the updating of a work in a more modern style was a means of restoring its efficacy..<sup>48</sup> The treatment of the Madonna of S. Luca owned by the convent of S. Francesca Romana, Rome is an example of this practice. Underneath the thirteenth-century paint conservators found another icon executed in encaustic on linen and glued to a panel. The original was a seventh-century Roman image which had been 'updated' six centuries later..<sup>49</sup> However, it is also necessary to take into account that while some icons were being made to look more modern, others were restored with deliberately archaizing features.

Bessarion's treatment of this Byzantine icon that he donated to S. Maria in Cosmedin may appear perplexing at first glance. The cardinal commissioned an 'update' of a thirteenth-century work, but he chose an artist who would execute this renewal in an archaizing style. This raises the question of whether the image was intended to look old or new. It is possible that both were intended. By retaining a sense of antiquity, the authenticity of the icon (which was embedded in its links with Constantinople) was preserved. An explanation offered by art historians for this stylistic archaizing is the religious desire for an 'authentic' image..<sup>50</sup> According to Belting, the icon was no longer considered to have any artistic techniques to teach western practitioners and therefore the legends surrounding the image and its ancestry were more important than the art itself..<sup>51</sup> Age could also justify the sacred claims of the image and this icon was perceived as 'ancient' and linked to Constantinople through the cardinal. These beliefs were commonplace: for example, the monks of the monastery of St Catherine at Sinai gave an early fourteenth-century micromosaic depicting Christ as the Man of Sorrows to S. Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome in 1380. During the fifteenth century the Romans were convinced that it was the

---

<sup>48</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 79; Hoeniger, *The Renovation of Paintings*, 24. Alessandro Conti also discusses the restoration of efficacy in his analysis of the documented work carried out by Martino di Bartolomeo in 1404 in the Cathedral of Siena on several paintings and sculptures. See Conti, *Storia del restauro e della conservazione d'opere d'arte*, Milan 1988, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Hoeniger, *The Renovation of Paintings*, 28. This is the earliest surviving example of a repainted icon in Italy known to Hoeniger. The history of the discovery of the original can be found in Pico Cellini, 'Una Madonna molto antica', *Proporzioni. Studi di storia dell'arte a cura di Roberto Longhi*, Rome 1950, 1-6.

<sup>50</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 73.

<sup>51</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 330.

image commissioned by St Gregory himself to commemorate the appearance of Christ at the altar during the celebration of mass..<sup>52</sup> As this miracle had taken place eight centuries earlier, it was the antiquity and associated legend which lent value to the object.

## Icons for Politics and Personal Use

Bessarion was using icons for political as well as personal devotional reasons from early on in his Italian career during his appointment as legate in Bologna (1450-55). The first evidence for this can be found in the cardinal's revival of the cult of the Virgin of St Luke in the city..<sup>53</sup> After the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 Bessarion became interested in a twelfth-century icon executed in the Byzantine style and kept in the sanctuary of the Madonna di S. Luca on the Guardia hill near Bologna. The icon was said to have been transported from Constantinople when the city was under threat from the Ottoman Turks in 1160..<sup>54</sup> In honour of the icon housed there, Bessarion restored the monastery of the Madonna di S. Luca..<sup>55</sup> This was probably both a devotional act and a means of establishing a good relationship with his Bolognese government. From the beginning of his career in the West, Bessarion was making use of the icon for its political potential as well as for its religious assets.

Ownership of an icon alleged to be by the hand of St Luke brought fame and wealth to an individual or a site. A monastery's prestige could be greatly enhanced by acquiring an icon, as was the case at the Monastery of S. Nilo, Grottaferrata where Bessarion provided the monks with the panel mentioned above as one of the Rome area's famous seven icons, depicting the Madonna and Child (Figure 38).

---

<sup>52</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 97. Nagel and Wood cite Carlo Bertelli, 'The Image of Piety in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme', *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibbard and Milton J. Lewine, London 1967, 40-55.

<sup>53</sup> Cavallaro, 'Antoniazio e le confraternite', 345.

<sup>54</sup> Cavallaro, 'Antoniazio e le confraternite', 345. Chroniclers of Bologna record the emergence of a cult around the icon after the Fall of Constantinople and the many times the panel was carried in processions. For more on the icon in Bologna see P. Mattioli, *Guida storica dei devoti della Madonna di S. Luca*, Bologna 1894.

<sup>55</sup> Bacchelli, 'La legazione del cardinale Bessarione', 143. No source is given for this statement.

The icon dates to around 1200 and is thought to be from Cyprus..<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately it is not known where Bessarion acquired this icon although it was most likely sourced via Italy or Crete. The present day panel measures 123 x 85mm, and was encased in a baroque frame in 1665 by Francesco Barberini after the style of the shutters and their condition were deemed inadequate..<sup>57</sup> The Grottaferrata icon served to draw pilgrims from all over the region and further afield, providing Bessarion with the opportunity to promote the monastery in the eyes of the pope. The donation was made by the cardinal during his tenure as commendatory abbot (1462-72), and the 1462 inventory commissioned by Bessarion lists his gift of 'unam imaginem Virginis pro altare maiore de ligno' to the church..<sup>58</sup> The art historian Valentino Pace considers this to be the icon for which the monastery became famous, and he describes how the panel was intended to be used as the centre of a triptych with the Annunciation on one side and the founding saints on the other..<sup>59</sup> Very little is known of the icon's history prior to Bessarion's donation: it is possible that it was part of the cardinal's personal collection, although it is equally conceivable that he obtained it for the purpose of making a donation. According to Antonio Rocchi, who wrote *L'Imagie di S. Maria di Grottaferrata* in the nineteenth century, the shutters that the cardinal wanted to flank his icon were allegedly discovered by Bessarion in the narthex of the church at Grottaferrata..<sup>60</sup>

By looking at this gift in context with Bessarion's administrative reforms, the cardinal's work at Grottaferrata seems to indicate an appreciation of the monastery's role within the Italian papal state,

<sup>56</sup> V. Pace. 'Presenze e influenze cipriote nella pittura duecentesca italiana', *Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina*, Ravenna 1985, 64; Guerrini, 'Il Bessarione a Grottaferrata', 810.

<sup>57</sup> 'Dicta Imago est circumcirca ornata ex ornamento ligneo toto inaurato, et de breve ornabitur alio ornamento novo ex lapidibus marmoreis pretiosis, pietate, et expensis Eminentissimi Domini Cardinalis Barberini Commendatarij...' ASV, Arm. VII 11, f.7v. Cited in Guerrini, 'Il Bessarione a Grottaferrata', 810, n. 16.

<sup>58</sup> Guerrini, 'Il Bessarione a Grottaferrata', 808. Giannini theorises that the 'Madonna of wood' could also refer to a statue. But Petta points out that a line later in the inventory, the object is referred to as 'unam pacem de ligno etiam pro altare'. He argues that 'pacem' implies a small panel, a 'tavoletta con sacra immagine per portare la pace', i.e. a panel which would be kissed before communion. Giannini, 'Vita della Theotocos di Grottaferrata', 3-47. The inventory is printed in Petta, 'L'Inventario degli Oggetti del Monastero di Grottaferrata nel 1462', 93-114 and the reference to the image of the Virgin is listed on f. 114 under the heading: 'Res quas portari de Roma et fieri in monasterio fecit d[ominus] archiepiscopus syontinus [Bessarion]' p. 110.

<sup>59</sup> Pace, 'Presenze e influenze cipriote', 256, note 7.

<sup>60</sup> Guerrini, 'Il Bessarione a Grottaferrata', 808. Rocchi wrote two books in which he discusses Bessarion and the icon at Grottaferrata: *L'immagine di S. Maria di Grotta Ferrata*, Rome 1887 and *La Badia di Grottaferrata*, Rome 1904.

and the donation of the icon is consistent with this attitude. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is arguable that the cardinal wanted Grottaferrata to be a Greek institution that would function within the parameters of the Roman Church. His reforms there introduced several western practices..<sup>61</sup> Owning an icon, which the writer of the history of the Madonnas of St Luke ascribed to the Evangelist's hand..<sup>62</sup> elevated the church at Grottaferrata to the same status as the Roman churches of S. Maria in Aracoeli, S. Maria del Popolo and S. Maria Maggiore. Both the reputations of the Roman region, as the home of these precious icons, and of Bessarion, who engineered the acquisition at Grottaferrata, were enhanced by the donation.

The cardinal also made donations of icons on a more personal level..<sup>63</sup> The micromosaic of St Demetrios which, according to the general consensus, he may have given to his secretary Niccolò Perotti is an example of this very practice..<sup>64</sup> It bore a (now lost) inscription in archaizing letters in silver revetment of a prayer attributed to Emperor Justinian:

Oh Great Martyr Demetrios, intercede with the Lord that he may help me, I, Your faithful servant, the basileus of the Romans, Justinian, to conquer my enemies and subjugate them beneath my feet.

The metalwork also depicted a double-headed eagle whose imperial associations were probably meant to recall themes of Late Antiquity. With its antique points of reference conveyed through the inscription and the visual motif of the eagle, the icon was clearly deemed by Bessarion as an object that would be valued by western humanists for its historicity and authenticity. The inscription, providing 'evidence' of the mosaic's heritage, endowed it with more significance than its high quality aesthetic

---

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>62</sup> The canon and vicar of S. Maria Maggiore dedicated this treatise to Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville in 1464. *De Sacra dei genetricis imagine quae in basilica illius maiori Romae asservatur, quam Beatus Gregorius, per urbem detulit, et posto' urbem liberavit*. BAV, Vat. Lat. 3921, ff. 72r-88r.

<sup>63</sup> For an in-depth study of Byzantine attitudes to saints and icons, see Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies*.

<sup>64</sup> According to Nagel and Wood, Bettini was the first to comment on the possible link between this icon and Bessarion in his article, 'Appunti per lo studio dei mosaici portatili bizantini', *Felix Ravenna*, XLVI, 1 (1938), 7-39. See more recently: Evans, *Byzantium*, cat. 139: 231; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 98-99. Perotti donated this mosaic to his birth city in Sassoferrato in 1472.

assets could carry alone. Forged documents were frequently used to establish the provenance of the icon, although in the case of St Demetrios Bessarion relied on the visual and textual elements of the object to convey the historicity.

This icon would have been a prized acquisition for Bessarion's secretary who is known to have been an avid collector of antiquities. It is a wooden panel containing a micromosaic of St Demetrios, a martyr from Thessalonike (Figure 39). He wears military garb and carries a spear and a shield, decorated with a blue ground and a heraldic white lion and stylized gold flowers. The background of the mosaic is gold and tiled. Above the head of the saint is the lead ampulla which is carved with his bust on one side and a portrait of St Theodora, a nun also from Thessalonike, in a crude archaizing style. The icon of Demetrios can be dated to the beginning of the fourteenth century; the metal revetment is fifteenth-century Italian; and the ampulla containing the relic of the holy oil has been traced to thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Thessalonike.<sup>65</sup> The mosaic is of a high quality with the tesserae arranged densely. The figure of the saint is similar to other Palaeologan period models such as that of the mosaics in the Church of Christ at the Chora Monastery (Kariye Camii), executed in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. The figures are depicted in elegant poses with elongated bodies depicted in meticulous detail.

The icon's distinct appearance contributes to its recognition as a type. Essentially this is a conservative work of art. In contrast to the work of Antoniazio and other fifteenth-century Italian icon painters, an effort was made to preserve the 'true' characteristics of the saint by maintaining a stylistic consistency over the ages rather than attempting to innovate artistically. This mosaic is characteristic of an icon intended originally for personal use with its representation of a single figure, its small dimensions and

---

<sup>65</sup> Evans, *Byzantium*, cat. 139: 231. The ampulla inscription reads: 'This ampulla bears holy oil drawn from the well in which the body of the divine Demetrios reposes, which gushes here, and accomplishes miracles for the entire universe and for the faithful.'

its non-narrative composition. While we cannot definitively ascertain the use to which Perotti put his icon, in the context of fifteenth-century Rome, these private icons seemed to have value as antiquities.

Unlike the icons of SS Apostoli and S. Maria in Cosmedin with their Italian, quattrocento flavour, the mosaic of St Demetrios is distinguished by its non-western attributes. The practice of collecting Byzantine icons like museum pieces was a western phenomenon.<sup>66</sup> As was mentioned earlier, Pope Paul II was an enthusiastic collector of icons from his days as Cardinal Pietro Barbo. The scholar Rembrandt Duits has identified the pope's curatorial approach to his collection. Paul II arranged them as exhibits and inventorized them, providing evidence that icons in private collections were treated in many cases by westerners as artefacts rather than (or even in addition to) objects of private devotion..<sup>67</sup>

### **Cardinal Bessarion's Reliquary**

In this section Cardinal Bessarion's reliquary of the True Cross will be examined in the context of his interaction with icons. This *stauroteca*, a reliquary containing parts of the True Cross, was bequeathed to him by his longstanding friend Gregory, the uniate Patriarch of Constantinople (1443-50) at his death in 1459. Gregory had received the relic from the Empress Irene at some time when he was the court confessor..<sup>68</sup> It consists of three parts: the central panel in gilded silver, which contains the relics of the True Cross; a U-shaped frame and sliding lid painted with narrative scenes from the Passion; and a silver shaft (Figure 40). The central core of the reliquary is a filigree cross with a silver crucifix in the centre with Christ depicted in high relief. The cross is embedded in a panel of blue enamel with gold stars. There are eight disks in green enamel decorating the cross, and each disk bears a silver letter. The figure of Christ is crowned with a diadem of pearls and gemstones, and at his feet are the

---

<sup>66</sup> Maguire REF

<sup>67</sup> Duits, "'Una Icona Pulchra'", 134. See also the recently published chapter by Duits, 'Byzantine Icons in the Medici Collection' in *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe*, 157-88.

<sup>68</sup> See Polacco, 'La storia del reliquario Bessarione'. Polacco summarises the various theories about the meanings of the cryptic inscriptions which identify Empress Irene as a one-time owner and her act of donation to Gregory.

skull of Adam and a lily. The panel into which the Cross has been inserted has been divided into eight compartments. In the top two are plates with embossed figures of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. Beneath these are two glass windows containing relics from the True Cross. Figures of St Helena and St Constantine stand on either side of the Cross beneath the transversal arm. In the lower compartments are two more glass windows containing fragments of Christ's vestment.

The filigree Cross is the oldest part, but art historians have not been able to agree on an exact date for the rest of the reliquary. Various proposals link it with the courts of Michael VIII (r. 1259-82); Michael IX (r. 1295-1320); John VIII (r. 1425-28); and Constantine XI (r. 1449-53).<sup>69</sup> Empress Irene added the panel and gems, along with the inscriptions and the images of Constantine and Helena. By thus embellishing the *stauroteca* Irene gave the reliquary the features of an icon. The art historian Renato Polacco hypothesises that Irene bestowed the relic on Gregory before he set out on his mission to the Council of Florence in 1438. In his opinion the gift was a symbol of the Greek aspirations for the union of the Churches: to secure western support for the defence of Byzantium..<sup>70</sup> Presumably the empress was investing the confessor with her confidence and providing him with the means to impress the westerners whom he would encounter in Florence.

The reliquary has a wooden cover and U-shaped frame painted with scenes of the Passion and Crucifixion and decorated with precious stones and silver revetment. The sliding central panel has been identified both with the Italo-Byzantine school of Venice in the late fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries but also with the metropolitan Byzantine school of the middle fourteenth century..<sup>71</sup> It shows

---

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of the cover of the *staurotheke* see the catalogue entry in Evans, *Byzantium*, cat. 325, 540-41.

<sup>70</sup> Renato Polacco has written an article, 'La Storia del Reliquiario Bessarione', which considers the inscriptions in close detail as a means of reading the history of the reliquary. Polacco, 'La storia del reliquario Bessarione', 89.

<sup>71</sup> Polacco suggested that the *staurotheke* was painted in mid-fifteenth-century Venice by a Byzantine artist living in exile. However, In 'La teca di Bessarione e la croce di San Teodoro di Venezia', *Dedalo* 3 (1922), 139-54, Gino Fogolari dates the reliquary to 1355 when Emperor Matthew Kantakouzenos ascended and his wife Irene ascended the throne. Evans, *Byzantium*, 540-1, cat. 325.

a complex narrative scene dominated by Christ on the Cross before the walls of Jerusalem and on top of the rock of Cavalry. A pair of grieving angels hovers over the scene against a silver background, which was probably commissioned by Bessarion..<sup>72</sup> Two groups of figures flank the Cross: on the left is the Virgin supported by mourning women, and on the right is John the Evangelist with a centurion and the sponge bearer Stephaton. At the foot of the Cross three soldiers cast dice for Christ's blue garment. The elaborate narrative is common to the Byzantine and Italian schools of the period but the high quality is related to the best Byzantine art of the fourteenth century, represented in objects such as the icon with the Doubting Thomas donated to the Monastery of the Transfiguration in Meteora by Maria Palaiologina..<sup>73</sup> Work from this period is characterised by the complexity of the iconography, the centralised balanced compositions and the pictorial depth achieved by using architectural motifs to frame the scenes. The ornate nature of these compositions and the subtle polychromy contribute to a sense of dynamic movement. Seven other smaller scenes from the Passion form the frame of Bessarion's reliquary and are painted in a similar style. The back of the reliquary consists of two silver sheets inscribed in Latin marking the donation of the object to the Scuola di S. Maria dei Battuti della Carità in Venice by Bessarion.

The cardinal took the precious reliquary and used it to further his political goals in the West. On 5 July 1463 Pius II appointed him as papal legate to Venice where his primary mission was to achieve a commitment from the Venetians to use their navy to fight the Ottomans. Two years previously the cardinal had visited the Republic on his way back from an unsuccessful trip to Germany and was received warmly. His name was even inscribed in the book of notables, the *Maggior Consilio*, a great honour for a non-native. On 29 August 1463 Bessarion issued an Act of Donation to the Scuola di S. Maria dei Battuti della Carità, granting the confraternity possession of the reliquary upon the cardinal's death. Polacco proposes that the cardinal chose the lay confraternity for reasons of political expediency

---

<sup>72</sup> Evans, *Byzantium*, cat. 325, 540-1. It is proposed that the metal revetment would have rendered the painting shiny in imitation of the gold halos added to so many icons in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy.

<sup>73</sup> Evans, *Byzantium*, cat. 24A, 50-51.



related to Bessarion's efforts to win popular support for his Crusade mission..<sup>74</sup> The Scuola was a confraternity of flagellants founded in 1260 in Venice – the oldest such institution, which had become a model for future confraternities..<sup>75</sup> In 1261 the confraternity was installed at the site of the monastery of the Carità, and a somewhat tense relationship with the monks was initiated..<sup>76</sup> By 1344 the brothers were building an enormous *albergo* (or hostel) on monastery land, and in 1411 they were given permission to erect a hospital and a priory to fulfil their charity obligations..<sup>77</sup> Bessarion visited the Scuola in August 1463 and was invited to become a member of the confraternity following the death of Cardinal Prospero Colonna:

While Bessarion was in Venice he visited the Oratory of the Carita confraternity [and saw] the pious works of the brothers. Because of the death of Cardinal Prospero Colonna, which happened in that same year 1463, he was asked by the Great Protector and other notable members if he were worthy to wear their white [habit], he assented very civilly to their requests..<sup>78</sup>

This invitation would have been a resounding endorsement of Bessarion's assimilation into the West. As it was a thriving and venerable institution, Bessarion was probably attracted by the social position of the Scuola. In medieval and Renaissance Venice respectable Roman Catholic devotion was dominated by confraternities. These associations were governed by elected lay officials, and the Scuola della Carità had the patronage of leading Venetian notables such as the bishops Ulisse Aliotti and Nicola Perrotto, Martino da Soto, and Giovanne Barocchio and the prefect of the trireme, Gerolamo

<sup>74</sup> Polacco, 'La storia del reliquario Bessarione', 88.

<sup>75</sup> Crouzet-Pavan, *Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise*, II, 779.

<sup>76</sup> According to Gino Fogolari, there is a document between the confraternity brothers and the monastery for the construction of an 'archa' in 1261. Crouzet-Pavan, *Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise*, II, 779, n.170.

<sup>77</sup> ASV, Sta Maria della Carità, reg. 311, B. 2, 26 Nov. 1411. From 1441 the financial situation of the monastery improved and enabled the reconstruction of the church. Crouzet-Pavan, *Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise*, II, 780, n. 176..

<sup>78</sup> '... dum Venetiis degeret S.R.E. Cardinalis Bessario, cum Sodalitii Caritatis Oratorium devotionis ergo inviserit, ita piis Confratrum operibus... ut a Magno Custode, ceterisque primariis Confratribus, ob Cardinalis Prosperi Columnae mortem, quae eodem anno 1463 acciderat... humillime rogatus, ut eorum albo adscribi dignaretur, eorum precibus perhumaniter annuerit.' Schioppalalba, *In Perantiquam Sacram Tabulam Graecam*, 122. Translated from the Latin by Laura Bolick.

Vallaresso..<sup>79</sup> According to the scholar Brian Pullan, the ritual of flagellation, practiced by the Scuola dei Battuti in public and private, was a bid to mitigate God's anger towards the world by taking on the pain of his Son..<sup>80</sup> In his *Encyclica ad Graecos* composed in 1463, Bessarion wrote that the weight and multitudes of sins were to blame for the tribulations of the Greeks. The cardinal believed that it was this anger which had brought about the Fall of Constantinople..<sup>81</sup> A donation to such a confraternity would have been deemed worthwhile as a campaign to restore God's favour towards the Byzantine Empire.

Bessarion may have made this donation partly for personal reasons, a possibility that to date none of the literature has considered. After receiving membership to the Scuola di S. Maria dei Battuti della Carità he was doubtless keen to consolidate the confraternity's sense of privilege at having acquired so illustrious a member..<sup>82</sup> This confraternity was particularly focused on the care of its members' souls after death. Citing the preamble to their first statutes in his book on Venetian confraternities, Pullan describes the confraternity's belief that man is besieged by sin and the devil, that life on earth is transitory and fleeting and that since man does not know when the hour of his passing from the present will be, all men must have the end of their earthly days before their eyes..<sup>83</sup> In 1463 the cardinal was preoccupied with the fate of his body and soul after death – it was in this year that Pius II issued the bull granting him the use of the chapel of S. Eugenia as his burial site. Although he stipulated in his donation that he would remain in possession of the reliquary during his lifetime, he sent it to the confraternity before his death in 1472 when he was about to embark on a long, arduous journey at an advanced age. Presumably he was fearful that he would not survive. Once again we have evidence of the cardinal's efforts to care for his soul and his posthumous reputation in the context of western ritual. It appears that Bessarion may have donated his precious relic to the Scuola in return for prayers in

---

<sup>79</sup> Schioppalalba, *In Perantiquam Sacram Tabulam Graecam*, 125-26; Polacco, 'La storia del reliquario Bessarione', 88.

<sup>80</sup> Pignatti and Pullan, *Le Scuole di Venezia*, 10.

<sup>81</sup> *Encyclica ad Graecos*, PG, 161, 453B.

<sup>82</sup> Schioppalalba, *In Perantiquam Sacram Tabulam Graecam*, 147-48.

<sup>83</sup> Pignatti and Pullan, *Le Scuole di Venezia*, 16.

perpetuity. Johannes Baptista Schioppalalba records an inscription to be carved in marble beneath a painted portrait of the donor, referring to some such arrangement:

Brothers, when you cast your eyes hither, do not be burdened by the pious worship of the memory of Cardinal Bessarion, whose spirit is in the majority of you, and reflect with pleasing observation on the wood of the very holy cross, on the tunic of the saviour ... and on the very precious gifts he who lives in perpetuity bestowed on your oratory in his old age ....<sup>84</sup>

By his very act of giving, the cardinal would live on in perpetuity. Although the inscription seemed to deter the brothers from dwelling on Bessarion, his spiritual presence was nonetheless embodied in the gift.

Bessarion evidently thought that this reliquary/icon would serve a different function from that of the Madonna and Child panels painted for or donated to the chapel of S. Eugenia, the church of S. Maria in Cosmedin, or the Abbey of Grottaferrata. In the *albergo* of the Scuola della Carità it was locked away behind a panel which was painted by Gentile Bellini and included a portrait of the cardinal..<sup>85</sup> This suggests little opportunity for extended contemplation and meditation – it was an object for fleeting display in a procession. The shaft, which was commissioned by the cardinal, is evidence that it was meant to be carried. The reliquary was a rallying point and a trophy reserved for ceremonies rather than a vehicle for a dialogue between the viewer and the divine. After Bessarion sent the stauroteca to Venice from Bologna in 1472, it was immediately solemnly processed from San Marco to the Scuola di S. Maria dei Battuti della Carità.

---

<sup>84</sup> 'Si quando, Fratres, oculos huc adjeceritis, Bessarionis Cardinalis Memoriam pie colere ne gravemini, qui majorum vestrorum in se animum, atque observantium grate reputans, lingo crucis sanctissimo, servatoris tunica, mulisque praeterea religiosissimis, ac pretiosissimis muneribus se ipsum privans, sacrarium hoc vestrum, et vetustate, et Sanctimonia apud omnes clarum, vivens perpetuo decoravit.', Schioppalalba, *In Perantiquam Sacram Tabulam Graecam*, 148. Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>85</sup> For the panel painted by Giovanni Bellini, which includes a posthumous portrait of Cardinal Bessarion, see Campbell, 'Cardinal Bessarion and two Members of the Scuola della Carità...' and Campbell and Chong, *Bellini and the East*, 2005.

This hybrid reliquary/icon had a function that was not merely spiritual for the Cardinal. By this time the object had a history as a sort of baton to be passed to the next tireless advocate for Byzantium. As its recipient in 1459, Bessarion was assuming the campaign which Irene had entrusted to Gregory: that of persuading the Italians to support a Crusade. This donation was also a means of generating public support for the Crusade. Undoubtedly choreographed, the Venetians proclaimed their intention to mount a crusade in the Piazza San Marco on the same day that Bessarion made his gift. It could be argued that a relic of the True Cross was a rather fitting gift to those whom Bessarion was trying to persuade to fight the Muslims and defend Christianity. The mother of Constantine, St Helena, found the True Cross in the Holy Land and brought back a piece to Constantinople in around 400. The True Cross in its entirety was transferred to Constantinople in 635 just before the Holy Land was ceded to Islam..<sup>86</sup> For centuries the relic of wood from the True Cross possessed connotations with the defence of the Christian empire. By the fifteenth century three separate legends had been combined to create a potent cult. These were the 'Finding of the Cross', the 'Exaltation of the Cross', and the 'Lignum Crucis'.

In the first St Helena discovered the True Cross thanks to the help of a converted Jew in the Holy Land. Byzantine iconography frequently depicts Helena and her son Constantine flanking an image of the Cross, personifying the Christian Empire (as in the case of Bessarion's reliquary)..<sup>87</sup> An example of this imagery being deployed in a western context can be seen in artefacts such as the medallions incorporated into the twelfth-century Stavelot Triptych. The Exaltation refers to the Emperor Heraclius' (610-641) victory over the Persian king Chosroes II, who allegedly purloined the Cross from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Heraclius also stood against the spreading Arab

---

<sup>86</sup> Several versions exist of the how the Cross ended up in Constantinople. On the eve of the surrender of Jerusalem the inhabitants transferred the Cross and it was placed in the Palace of Constantinople. Nicephorus tells an alternative history in which the Cross was sent to Constantinople soon after her restoration in 630. The patriarch Sergius received it at Blachernae and then processed it to St. Sophia in a parade of great pomp. Frolov, *La relique de la Vraie Croix*, 73.

<sup>87</sup> Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood*, 4.

incursions into Palestine and became known as a defender of Christianity..<sup>88</sup> The Lignum Crucis also had eastern links: it was the Wood of Paradise, planted by Seth and admired by David, Moses and Solomon. In her role as sibyl, the Queen of Sheba was said to have recognized it as the wood of Christ's Cross, foretelling Christ's death..<sup>89</sup> The legend of the True Cross was a subject that engaged both Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic patrons, and in this instance Bessarion appears to have drawn together the two cultures when he offered this reliquary to an Italian rather than to a Greek institution.

Westerners held Constantinople to be a more important source than Jerusalem for fragments of the Cross, and anything that came from the Byzantine city was considered to be authentic..<sup>90</sup> Bessarion's reliquary would have possessed that same degree of authenticity, especially as it was believed that Constantine had delivered relics of the True Cross into the hands of the Patriarch of Constantinople – a role which Bessarion now fulfilled. The Venetians and the confraternity may also have been flattered by the imperial associations with these relics. Owners of fragments of the True Cross tended to be highly placed in society – they were frequently the *basileus* (the emperor) or his family members..<sup>91</sup> From Bessarion's point of view the donation of the reliquary would have established a pact between Venice and the cardinal as a representative of the papal agenda. Relics of the True Cross implied an intimate and indissoluble link between two parties. For instance princes used the relics to guarantee the loyalty of their followers, as in 917 when Constantine Porphyrogenitos VII made his generals swear an oath of loyalty on the relics in a campaign against the Bulgars..<sup>92</sup> The True Cross also had relevant military associations – emperors would carry fragments on their campaigns as a rallying point for the

---

<sup>88</sup> Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood*, 9-11.

<sup>90</sup> Constantinople was seen as the successor of Jerusalem by the Byzantines themselves. Frolov, *La relique de la Vraie Croix*, 86.

<sup>91</sup> Imperial family members who owned staurotheke included Irene Doukas, the wife of Alexis I Comnenus; Maria, wife of Nicephorus Botaneiates (Manuel I); Maria and Eudocia, the daughters of Alexis I; and Irene, the niece of John VIII or Constantine XI. Frolov, *La relique de la Vraie Croix*, 76.

<sup>92</sup> Before going into battle with the Bulgars the generals swore an oath of loyalty on a relic of the True Cross brought to the Diabasis plains near Constantinople by the archpriest Constantine Kephelas. Frolov, *La relique de la Vraie Croix*, 78.

soldiers. In 1164 the victory of Grand Duke Andre Bogoljubskij over the Bulgars of the Volga was attributed to a fragment of the True Cross and an icon of the Madonna which the prince was in the habit of carrying on his military excursions. Before battle the entire army would pray before these two relics.<sup>93</sup> Bessarion's efforts to associate the reliquary of the True Cross with military victory and campaigns against the infidel, which was a conventional interpretation of this type of relic, may have been in this specific instance, a bid to compel Venice to demonstrate a commitment to a Crusade by offering them a gift that represented legends surrounding the defence of Christendom.

### **Bessarion and the Philosophy of Icons**

The discourse on icons dates from the early Christian period, and several of the writers with whom Bessarion was familiar had written about them. St Basil (c.329-79), Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (early sixth century) and John of Damascus (675-753) all defended imagery, and the image was frequently deployed as a metaphor for Christian living. This was primarily an Orthodox debate, which had featured to a lesser degree at various points in the West, but in the fifteenth century it was taken up again by Roman Catholic ecclesiastical scholars. Writing around 360 in Cappadocia, St Basil observed, '[In the Scriptures] the lives of saintly men, recorded and handed down to us, lie before us like living images of God's government, for our imitation of their good works.'<sup>94</sup> These concepts of imitation, living images and transmission were fundamental to explaining the icon. The viewer was expected to imitate the figure depicted, but this was more than a symbolic gesture. The image possessed a twofold power: divine authority owing to the likeness it shared with the subject and holiness generated by its physical contact (however many times removed) with the sacred original, 'the archetype' or original image painted in the physical presence of the subject..<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Frolow, *La relique de la Vraie Croix*, 79.

<sup>94</sup> *Saint Basil: The Letters*, I: 15-17.

<sup>95</sup> See Vikan's article, 'Ruminations on Edible Icons' for further discussion of icon copies and the implications for the status of the image as a holy object, esp. 52.

Drawing on one of these authors, multiple functions for the icon can be found in the writings of St John of Damascus. Despite John of Damascus' origins, he quoted Pope Gregory the Great, who was writing a generation earlier in the West, when he wrote that pictures were the books of the illiterate: 'What the book does for those who understand letters, the image does for the illiterate; the word appeals to hearing, the image appeals to sight; it conveys understanding.'<sup>96</sup> An icon was equally important as a reflection of the divine:

For we see images in created things intimating to us dimly reflections of the divine; as when we say there is an image of the holy Trinity which is beyond any beginning, in the sun, its light and its ray, or in a fountain welling up and the stream flowing out and the flood and its fragrance..<sup>97</sup>

This was a Neoplatonic concept which would be echoed later in the iconography of Bessarion's hierarchy of angels in his burial chapel at S. Eugenia (see Chapter 1). According to this theory, that which is holy, i.e. which does not have a bodily form, is translated into visual concepts which man, despite his limitations, can grasp. In a related meaning, some Orthodox Christians perceived the image to be a visual metaphor for the soul.

John of Damascus expressed the theory that icons could also be used to express the glory of God and his saints:

I come into the common surgery of the soul, the church; the lustre of the painting draws me to vision and delights my sight like a meadow and imperceptibly introduces my soul to the glory of God. I have seen the perseverance of the martyr, the recompense of the crowns, and as if by

---

<sup>96</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, I:17.

<sup>97</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, I:11.

fire I am eagerly kindled to zeal, and falling down I venerate God through the martyr and I receive salvation..<sup>98</sup>

Bessarion would have been steeped in these philosophies, but he may have been more influenced by the contemporary debates that were taking place among his peers in the West regarding the function and aesthetics of icons.

One of Cardinal Bessarion's colleagues and friends was Nicholas Cusanus, a German papal legate, who had political and intellectual links with Byzantium. In 1437 Cusanus was appointed papal legate to Constantinople to invite the Greek leaders to the Council of Florence..<sup>99</sup> His interest in and use of icons demonstrates the intellectual and theological potential of these art objects. Bessarion and Cusanus were fellow scholars as well as friends, and Cusanus' attention to icons was heavily influenced by the Neoplatonism that Bessarion had introduced to him. His experience in the Byzantine Empire, which inspired a lifelong interest in Greek literature and scholarship, was combined with a career in Rome and northern Europe to leave Cusanus in an ideal position to comment on icons and contemporary theories of seeing. As a scholar he wrote many treatises and is renowned for the hospital he founded for the poor where he installed his vast library. While there is no evidence to date that Bessarion influenced Cusanus on the issue of icon veneration, the written work of the German demonstrated western contemporary intellectual approaches to icons with which it must be assumed that the cardinal engaged.

Among his writings, Cusanus published 'De Visione Dei' in which he explored the theology of the visual senses by means of a panel depicting the 'All Seeing', a painting that he called 'the image of

---

<sup>98</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, I:47.

<sup>99</sup> Moffitt Watts, *Nicholas Cusanus*, 5.



God'...<sup>100</sup> In the text he set up an experiment for the brothers who received the panel. He instructed them to stand around the painting at equal distances and to notice that each of them would have the impression that he was being watched by the painted figure...<sup>101</sup> Cusanus wrote, 'The gaze of the face falls on the smallest creature as well as the largest and on the whole of the universe.'<sup>102</sup> The point of this little drama was to provide Cusanus with a vehicle for explaining his theories of mystical theology to the brothers. By way of the metaphor of the all-seeing icon, Cusanus was exploring his Neoplatonic theory that man would come to know God by knowing himself...<sup>103</sup> According to the cardinal, Man is created in God's likeness and therefore the development of knowledge in himself is akin to understanding some of the divine nature. The monks were encouraged to make the leap from passive gazing at the icon to the active state of watching themselves gaze at the image. Thus they would understand that God is watching them and by their act of self-observation they would be in a truly meditative state by which they could access the divine. However, the exercise demonstrated an alternative understanding of the nature of an icon which reflected that there was more than one way of interpreting this art form in the fifteenth century. In this instance, Cusanus inverted the Byzantine theory that the viewer is the active force in the dialogue with the image. He proposed that 'the image of God' actually examined the viewer. A dichotomy existed in the painting whereby the gaze of the figure was at once fixed by the immobile nature of the two-dimensional representation while at the same time it was alive by nature of the divinity which inhabited the likeness. This was a phenomenon that Cusanus observed in many works of art such as the painting of St Veronica in his chapel in

---

<sup>100</sup> Although Nicholas Cusanus was writing in Latin, I have used a French translation of 'De Visione Dei'. Nicholas de Cues, 'Le Tableau ou la vision de Dieu' for the simple reason that I was unable to find an English translation in the libraries that I consulted, 31-32. Subsequently I have discovered that an English version is available online as an ebook at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/57393056/The-Vision-of-God-De-Visione-Dei-by-Nicholas-of-Cusa>

<sup>101</sup> 'Fixez-le où vous voulez, par exemple au mur nord. Vous, frères, placez-vous autour, à l'égale distance du tableau et regardez-le: de quelque côté qu'il l'examine, chacun de vous fera l'expérience d'être comme le seul à être vu par lui.' Nicholas de Cues, 'Le Tableau ou la vision de Dieu', 32.

<sup>102</sup> 'Il verra alors que ce regard veille avec un soin extrême à la plus petite créature comme à la plus grande et à la totalité de l'univers.' Nicholas de Cues, 'Le Tableau ou la vision de Dieu', 33.

<sup>103</sup> Moffitt Watts, *Nicholas Cusanus*, 157.

Coblenz and in the now destroyed work by Rogier van der Weyden in the town hall of Brussels, which depicted *The Justice of Trajan*...<sup>104</sup>

In his essay on Cusanus' treatise, H. Lawrence Bond considers the aesthetic nature of the icon which generated such intellectual and emotional inspiration in the priest..<sup>105</sup> From Cusanus' words it can be assumed that the image had a direct but non-specific gaze that seemed to rivet each viewer. The face would have appeared to dominate the frame out of context - there was no narrative element, no localizing information. This description suggests that it was a 'Holy Visage' or icon 'made without hands' (the *acheiropoieton*), a type known in the Byzantine Empire and the West. Although the painting itself no longer exists, its identity as an icon seems clear from the use to which Cusanus puts it – as the scholar Vikan asserts, an icon was defined by its function..<sup>106</sup> While we are lacking such a revealing text about icons from Bessarion's own pen, his close intellectual contact with Cusanus combined with his enthusiastic icon collecting habits would suggest that the cardinal was engaged in such debates about image veneration.

## Conclusion

Cardinal Bessarion demonstrated an active engagement with the western interest in icons imported from Byzantium and patronised locally. His commissions to Antoniazio Romano imply that he actively disagreed with some of his compatriots who complained about the westernization of Greek icons. Early in the century when Thessalonike became part of the Venetian Republic St Symeon lamented that western styles and motifs, which were too innovative and too far from the prototype,

---

<sup>104</sup> Nicholas de Cues, 'Le Tableau ou la vision de Dieu', 32, note 1.

<sup>105</sup> Bond, 'The "Icon" and the "Iconic Text"', 181-82. Bond makes an attempt to 'recreate' the aesthetics of the now-missing icon based on Cusanus' use and interpretation of the image.

<sup>106</sup> See note 96.

were flooding the market.<sup>107</sup> And not all Italians approved of the Greek influence either. Giovanni Battista Armenini complains in the sixteenth century about icons in Northern Italy, stating that houses were well decorated,

except for the paintings of holy images which for the most part consisted of little panels of certain figures *alla Greca*, very coarse, unpleasing and entirely soot-blackened; and apt to anything but to excite devotion or to be an ornament to the place....<sup>108</sup>

But Bessarion was both adapting to and instrumental in the contemporary fashion for icons and reliquaries that manifested itself throughout Europe. That this movement was bigger than one man's influence is evident in the widespread geographical parameters of this popularity. Like Italy, Northern Europe experienced a similar interest in icons. In 1451 the renowned Cambrai Virgin and Child, thought to be by the hand of St Luke, was installed in the city cathedral after it had been acquired several years earlier by the canon Fursy du Bruille in Rome..<sup>109</sup> Actually it was an early fourteenth-century Sienese/Florentine copy of a Byzantine prototype. Nonetheless the icon, like its Roman sisters, attracted visitors and notables such as Duke Philip the Good in August 1457..<sup>110</sup> However, within Rome, Bessarion's role was significant. His interaction with icons and reliquaries mirrored that of Cardinal Pietro Barbo (later Pope Paul II). According to his inventory of 1457, Barbo put together a collection of artefacts including around forty 'Greek icons' during the 1450s..<sup>111</sup> Clearly it was not necessary to be Greek to have an interest in icons, and Bessarion contributed to and encouraged the renewed western enthusiasm of the quattrocento for these Byzantine devotional objects.

---

<sup>107</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 86. St Symeon's text can be found in Symeon of Thessalonica, *Dialogus Contra Haereses*, PG, 155: 112. Cyril Mango has published part of the relevant passage in Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 253-54.

<sup>108</sup> '...eccetto di pitture delle Sacre Imagini, le quali erano la maggior parte quadretti di certe figure fatte alla Greca, goffissime, dispiaceuoli, e tutte affumicate, le qualie ad ognie altra cosa pareuano esserui state poste, fuori che a mouer diuotione, ouero à fare ornamento à simil luoghi...' Armenini, *De' veri precetti della pittura*, Ravenna 1586, 188. Quoted in Rimbom, 'Icon to Narrative', 34.

<sup>109</sup> Wilson, 'Reflections on St Luke's Hand', 132. See also Maillard-Luypaert, 'D'une "image de Notre-Dame"', 175-97. On the Cambrai Virgin and Child see Abbé C. Thelliez, *La merveilleuse image de Notre-Dame de Grace de Cambrai, cinq siècles d'histoire*, Cambrai 1951 and Abbé Begne, *Histoire de Notre-Dame de Grace, patronne du diocèse de Cambrai*, Cambrai 1910.

<sup>110</sup> Maillard-Luypaert, 'D'une "image de Notre-Dame"', 185.

<sup>111</sup> Muntz, *Les Arts à la cour des papes*, II, 181-287; and Duits "'Una Icona Pulchra'".

To what extent did Bessarion share or help to create these antiquarian interests in icons? Certainly he seems to have appreciated their value as collector's items when he gave the mosaic of St Demetrios to his secretary. His use of icons and reliquaries suggests that he regarded them as objects with potential functions, one of which was to be used to political ends as gifts. These were the motives behind the donations to Grottaferrata and the confraternity of S. Maria dei Battuti della Carità. Nonetheless the cardinal evidently also approached icons from a personal religious angle. When he commissioned Antoniazio to paint the panel of the Madonna and Child for his chapel of S. Eugenia, he was paying homage to the intercessor for his soul. To what extent do these multiple approaches reflect a Greek or Latin outlook? Historians could argue that icons were Greek and that clearly in his use and appreciation of them Bessarion was clinging to his native culture. By extension, his promotion of them in the West might be interpreted as a vehicle for promoting Greekness. The reality is rather more complex. As in the case of the decoration of his burial chapel, the cardinal was appropriating Byzantine concepts and translating them into a Latin idiom which resulted in *his* assimilation into his new environment. This is a phenomenon that arises over and over again in Bessarion's career. Complex motives characterised the cardinal's patronage of culture to do with national identity and cultural exchange. It is paradoxical that by promoting Byzantine arts he did so in such a way as to emphasise the Latin identity that he was cultivating.

## Chapter Four: Cardinal Bessarion's Library Collection

Cardinal Bessarion is best known for the large library collection he amassed and which formed the nucleus of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. The collection was formed of about 900 volumes, over half of which were in Greek. The collection is dominated by a selection of religious, philosophical and historical texts, although there are also examples of books on mathematics and some literature. This chapter will look at the library in the context of the cardinal's career and his cultural achievements. I will demonstrate that Bessarion's collection was unique in comparison with other fifteenth-century Italian libraries gathered by his contemporaries but that it had an essentially western character. If his collection is viewed as a whole rather than as two individual collections divided by language, it becomes apparent that Bessarion was collecting with a Western readership in mind. A conventional interpretation of the cardinal's motivation in the choice of Venice as the repository for his books is that the Republic's close ties with Constantinople, Byzantium and Byzantine territories, a relationship that included effectively safeguarding such territories (e.g. Crete) from Ottoman expansion, made Venice the obvious place for the patronage of a state library. However, one of the purposes of this chapter is to demonstrate that there could be other nuances to this choice of city that are closely tied in with Bessarion's political career in the West. It is possible that choosing Venice to host his library collection was arguably an effort to establish a cultural status in the Republic that mirrored that of the Italian models of patronage that he saw practiced by the Medici in Florence and the papacy in Rome.

Scholarship to date has considered the Latin and Greek collections in isolation. Concetta Bianca argues that the Latin books were gathered haphazardly in the form of gifts and bequests. Scholars of the Greek collection maintain that Bessarion had a specific agenda to preserve the Byzantine heritage after the Fall of Constantinople. Using Lotte Labowsky's work on the multiple inventories produced for this collection, I am proposing instead that Bessarion actively worked towards the creation of a single collection that ended up being defined by his assimilation into a Latin environment.

The books that he collected in both Greek and Latin reflect the contemporary interests of Italian scholars. His grand donation to the Republic of Venice was a gesture that established his status as a fifteenth-century western patron. Undoubtedly Bessarion was sensitive to the preservation of his cultural roots in the form of literature and he could have donated the collection to Grottaferatta had he wished to declare an enduring Greek identity that took precedence over a Latin perspective. However, I would maintain that the library collection was a larger project that the cardinal conceived of in terms of his Latin legacy.

### **The Act of Donation**

By the Act of Donation, which was signed on 31 May 1468, Cardinal Bessarion bequeathed his entire book collection to the Republic of Venice. This act has been fundamental in defining how scholars interpret his library. Underlying clues in Bessarion's action seem to lend weight to the conclusion that the cardinal perceived his library to be a collection in the style of a fifteenth-century Italian patron. The essential implication of the act of donating his collection to a western institution was that Bessarion perceived his library to have a western character that would flourish in an Italian home. He chose to donate the collection to a secular power that was part of the western tradition rather than to a Byzantine institution such as one of the Basilian monasteries that he supervised.

In her book, *Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana: Six Early Inventories*, the historian Lotte Labowsky rightfully places much weight on the Act of Donation as a lens through which to analyse the collection. This well documented event records the donation of Bessarion's existing book collection to the Republic of Venice. Labowsky's analysis commences with the act of 1468 and considers the nature of the collection in the aftermath of the Donation. The significance of Labowsky's

work for this study is its thesis that the Donation was a fundamental element in any interpretation of Bessarion's perceptions of the nature of his library.

However, Bessarion originally bequeathed his library to the monastery on the island of S. Giorgio Maggiore in the Venetian lagoon in around 1463-64. This initial bequest to the Benedictine monastery included only the Greek half of his collection. This raises the question of what he planned to do with the Latin books which were almost as numerous as the Greek. While we do not know Bessarion's intentions for the Latin collection, it is evident that he initially conceived of his library as two separate collections to be treated in different ways. By 1468 he saw the books as a single unit – so what changed? No one has considered whether this shift reflected a change in the cardinal's motives for collecting or for making a donation. It is proposed here that this was a pivotal moment in the life of Bessarion's collection revealing the cardinal's conception of his library as a western cultural project.

Although the actual document of the bequest to S. Giorgio Maggiore has been lost, it is likely that it was made during Bessarion's embassy to the Venetian Republic in 1463-64. In many respects S. Giorgio Maggiore was an obvious destination for the cardinal's Greek books. It could be argued that the monastery was a symbol of the Venetian desire to perpetuate and dominate the Byzantine inheritance and thus an ideal repository for a collection of books which played a contribution in that very preservation of Greek culture. Nonetheless Bessarion chose a western, not a Greek institution, albeit one with many Byzantine connections. It was one of the richest institutions in Venice and it had held possessions in the Empire for centuries: in Negroponte, Tebe, Candia, Pera and Constantinople. Its dependents included churches and monasteries in Greek territories. It was even named after St George, who was highly venerated in Greece, and owned two important relics of the saint – his head

and one of his arms.<sup>1</sup> In addition S. Giorgio Maggiore had established a reputation as a cultural centre and as a host for important guests of the Republic – the Patriarch of Constantinople was accommodated there when the Greek contingent arrived in Venice on its way to the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438.

However, the monastery of S. Giorgio Maggiore belonged to the western Roman Catholic Benedictine Order, which was renowned for its high quality scholarship, and this might have been an alternative, or additional, reason for the cardinal's interest in it. In the fifteenth century there was a strong intellectual revival in the Order led by Ludovico Barbo, the abbot of the monastery of S. Giustina in Padua.<sup>2</sup> After 1431 the Congregation (a group of Benedictine monasteries in Padua belonging to the consortium of S. Giustina) revived in numbers, reputation and wealth throughout Italy. S. Giorgio Maggiore joined this Congregation. The Order's scholarly reputation was based on acts such as the donation of the Italian philologist Giorgio Valla's library to the monastery of SS Peter and Paul in Milan, as well as the presence of the Benedictines at courts such as that of Francesco Sforza, where intellectual life was carefully nurtured.<sup>3</sup> Bessarion was following a tradition of donation established by highly placed western patrons. By doing so his behaviour demonstrated that he was emulating the practice of conventional western networks of patronage.

Within this environment S. Giorgio maintained an excellent tradition of scholarship. Benedictine library holdings and surviving writings demonstrate that the monks' interests were humanistic: they owned books in Latin and in Greek. The main subject matter of the literature focused naturally on the

---

<sup>1</sup> Zorzi, 'Bessarione e Venezia', 209. Zorzi cites documents published in L. Lanfranchi's volume dedicated to S. Giorgio Maggiore, II-IV, Venice 1968-86 and G. Damerini, *L'isola e il cenobio di S. Giorgio Maggiore*, Venice 1969, 35, 134.

<sup>2</sup> *The Rule of St Benedict in English*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation*, 4.



study of the Bible, St Paul and the Church Fathers..<sup>4</sup> For example, in 1453 the library of the Paduan Benedictine monastery of S. Giustina was catalogued and found to hold 1,337 titles..<sup>5</sup>

S. Giorgio's established reputation for scholarship and its active library tradition may have made it initially an ideal repository for Bessarions' books. Reading and library traditions were fundamental to the Rule of St Benedict..<sup>6</sup> Chapter 48 of the Rule refers to a library and the habit of reading:

During the days of Lent, they should be free in the morning to read until the end of the tenth hour... During this time of Lent each one is to receive a book from the library, and is to read the whole of it straight through. These books are to be distributed at the beginning of Lent..<sup>7</sup>

Reading was advocated as a means of meditation, and the use of the library was structured and expected. In the annual reading circle each monk was given a text for which he had to account the following year. An exchange of books would take place at Lent. A small ceremony was instituted by which the books were placed on a carpet in the Chapter house, and St Benedict's *De observatione Quadragesimae* was read before the volumes were distributed to the monks..<sup>8</sup> However, the practice of outside consultation may have been less desirable in Bessarion's eyes. The situation of lending books and distributing them from a carpet in the Chapter house implies that it was not common for Benedictine libraries to have a reading room. Benedictine libraries served the liturgical needs of the monks, supplied them with religious reading, but also supplied outside scholars with access to texts for

---

<sup>4</sup> Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> It provides an instructive comparison with Bessarion's collection: the similarity of the texts in each library demonstrates that the cardinal shared western interests in certain authors and types of literature. The emphasis of the S. Giustina collection lay in the Scriptures, writings of the Fathers and texts regarding the Benedictine Rule. There were several editions of the Bible, parts of the Bible and the Breviary. Other authors included St Gregory, Thomas Aquinas, St Bernard, Bonaventura, Aristotle, Plotinus, Virgil, Pliny, Dante and Petrarch. There were grammars, Greek vocabularies and medical books. Although vastly bigger than Bessarion's library, the character of the two collections is very similar.

<sup>6</sup> Gisolfi and Sinding-Larsen, *The Rule, the Bible, and the Council*, 19, 23. For the English language translation of the Rule see *The Rule of St Benedict in English*.

<sup>7</sup> *The Rule of St Benedict in English*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> *The Rule of St Benedict in English*, 23.

consultation. Books were frequently lent outside the monastery with the provision of a signed receipt..<sup>9</sup> Bessarion stressed in his donation document that nothing in his collection could be alienated. The Benedictine practice of lending may have made him ultimately wary of his bequest to S. Giorgio Maggiore.

By 1467 Bessarion had changed his mind about the bequest and obtained a bull from Pope Paul II revoking the donation to S. Giorgio Maggiore. This decision is referred to in all three of the documents which would make up the eventual Act of Donation in May 1468. The Act of Donation sets forth the cardinal's reasons for donating his library, for revoking the original bequest to S. Giorgio Maggiore, and for choosing Venice in its stead. It is arguable that Bessarion's choice of Venice is key to interpreting his library as a collection established to reflect the interests and needs of Italian scholars. In the *Instrumentum Donationis Librorum* Bessarion gives the official reason for changing his mind - he was put off by the inaccessibility of the island: '...considering the monastery because it was an island, to which one cannot go except by boat'..<sup>10</sup>

As water has never been a major impediment in Venice, it is unlikely that this was the only reason. In 1433 Cosimo de' Medici had stayed on the island of S. Giorgio Maggiore and made provision for the construction of a new library by Michelozzo Michelozzi to replace the old one. Bessarion may have been anticipating this grand home for his books, but in 1463 when the donation was made, the library was still just a plan. It was not begun until 1471. Bessarion may have doubted whether the project would be realised and whether the integrity of his collection could be maintained.

---

<sup>9</sup> Gisolfi and Sinding-Larsen, *The Rule, the Bible, and the Council*, 24. For library rituals in Benedictine monasteries, Gisolfi and Sinding-Larsen cite the Benedictine monk, Jean Mabillon's (1632-1707) work, *Tractatus de studiis monasticis in tres partes distributis...auctore P. D. Joanne Mabillon...*, Venice 1745.

<sup>10</sup> '...consyderans quod monasterium ipsum sit in insula, ad quod nisi navigio iri non potest...', *Instrumentum Donationis Librorum*, cited in Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 154.

The cardinal's choice of Venice as the site of his library is often considered to be motivated by his perception of the maritime state as a 'second Byzantium', implying that Bessarion had an agenda to house his books in an environment as similar to the Greek lands as possible. Bessarion had links with Venice on many levels, and it should not be overlooked that he would have perceived the Republic to have a special relationship with the Byzantine Empire. He seems to have identified with it on an emotional level as a refuge for the Greeks and a 'home from home'. Writing in his letter, which followed the Act of Donation, to the Venetian doge Cristoforo Moro, Bessarion says that,

For since all nations from almost the whole of the earth flow into your state, especially that of the Greeks, who coming from their provinces by ship first disembarked in Venice, seem to enter an alternative Byzantium, having been driven to your city and bound by necessity to you moreover...<sup>11</sup>

However, much is made of this comment as evidence that Bessarion chose Venice as the closest venue in character that he could find to Constantinople. Bessarion's words were probably a reference to the Venice which the Greeks encountered in 1438 on their way to the Council of Ferrara-Florence. It was a moment of splendour for the city and it made a significant impression on the Byzantines. The Byzantines felt welcomed by Venice as friends, and this amity seems to have been recognised by Bessarion throughout his career. He was also heavily involved there because of the Greek community, which was the largest Greek minority in Europe over which the cardinal had titular ecclesiastical authority as Uniate Patriarch from April 1463.<sup>12</sup> As the Ottomans advanced over the years, Venice became the port of entry for the Greek refugees. This influx became a flood after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. The city took on the role of a haven, and many Greeks settled there in the Greek Quarter. Their presence made Venice a comfortable home where the Byzantines could re-establish their communities in an environment which was not too dissimilar from their own. While

---

<sup>11</sup> 'Cum enim in civitatem vestram omnes fere totius orbis nationes maxime confluant, tum praecipue graeci, qui e suis provinciis navigio venientes Venetiis primum descendunt, ea praeterea vobiscum necessitudine devincti, ut ad vestram appulsi urbem quasi alterum Byzantium introire videantur.' Cited in Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 148.

<sup>12</sup> Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 5. For reference to Bessarion as the Patriarch see the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 185 and for more on the Greek status in Venice see Giorgio Fedalto, *Ricerche storie sulla posizione giuridica ed ecclesiastica dei Greci a Venezia nei ss. XV e XVI*, Florence 1967, 33-34.

these assets are not insignificant, it is proposed here that Bessarion chose Venice for a host of political reasons that had more to do with his efforts to be seen, in the eyes of his Italian peers, as a western patron.

Why Venice? At this point the significance of the decision to treat the Latin and Greek texts as one collection becomes apparent. This shift in concept, which is not frequently commented on, doubled the size of the bequest and its importance. It is arguable that it demanded a grander solution. In the 1460s Venice was a thriving, wealthy Italian state. Its population of 80,000-100,000 inhabitants was rivalled only by Paris, Naples and Milan. The Venetians had just defeated Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan, and they dominated the Adriatic (Istria's coast, Dalmatia, Albania and the Ionian and Aegean Greek islands were still under Venetian control) which brought them much disposable wealth that could be used for cultural projects.<sup>13</sup> The Republic seemed more likely than the small island of S. Giorgio Maggiore to have the resources to construct the sort of grand library envisaged by Bessarion for his collection.

The cardinal had a personal relationship with Venice, which was an equally important factor in the donation arrangements. The Venetians flattered Bessarion with acts and words, boosting his credibility as an important figure in Italian politics. In 1460 the cardinal stayed in the city on his way to Germany.<sup>14</sup> On his return he stayed in Venice again and was greeted rapturously. It was at this point that his name was inscribed in the *Maggior Consilio*, the list of Venetian notables. This was the highest honour that the Venetians could confer on the cardinal, raising him to the status of Venetian aristocracy

---

<sup>13</sup> Zorzi, 'Bessarione e Venezia', 198.

<sup>14</sup> Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 4.

and symbolising their acceptance of Bessarion as the next best thing to a native born citizen of the Republic..<sup>15</sup>

Bessarion had established a relationship with Venice regarding the Crusade for which he campaigned tirelessly. In 1463 he was sent as papal legate to the Republic to coordinate the military effort, and it was during this embassy that he reached the peak of his political statesmanship. He subscribed to the emerging concept of Venice as the ideal 'polis' which was advanced in two treatises written by the humanist Paolo Morosini..<sup>16</sup> All the actions of the Republic are presented by Morosini as motivated by a love of liberty, tempered with a clear head for economics and legal structures. He too was heavily involved with the negotiations between Venice and Pope Pius II, and his aristocratic republicanism seems to have appealed to Bessarion. The cardinal is effusive in his flattery of Venice, writing in his letter to the doge following the Donation,

Firstly I cannot choose a place which is more protected, ruled by fairness, maintained by laws, or governed with integrity and wisdom, where there is a home for virtue, restraint, seriousness, justice and loyalty, where there is the most and greatest rule, thus it is even and moderate.

Minds are free to deliberate, there are no desires, none poisonous in sin, prudent men hold the tiller of rule and the good are put in command ... and forgetful of private conveniences they manage with the unanimous consent of the whole republican body and with great integrity..<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Zorzi, 'Bessarione e Venezia', 204. For more on the governmental structures of the fifteenth-century Venetian Republic see Frederic Lane's study, *Venice*, Johns Hopkins 1973.

<sup>16</sup> *Defensio Venetorum ad Europae principes contra obtrectatores* and *De rebus et forma reipublicae venetae* Gregorio Heymburg Germanorum doctore praeclearissimo, in Giuseppe Valentinelli, *Bibliotheca manuscripta ad S. Marci Venetiarum*, I-VI, Venezia 1868-1876: III, pp. 189-229.

<sup>17</sup> 'Primo enim non videbam quem locum eligere tutiorem possem, quam eum que aequitate regitur, legibus tenetur, integritate ac sapientia gubernatur, ubi virtutis, continentiae, gravitatis, iustitiae, fidei domicilium est; ubi imperium ut maximum est atque amplissimum, ita aequabile et moderatum; animi in consulendo liberi, nulli libidini, nulli delicto obnoxii, prudentes clavum imperii tenent, et boni malis praeponuntur ac privatorum commodorum obliti totum corpus reipublicae unanimi consensu et summa integritate procurant.' Cited in and translated by Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 148.

The Estense ambassador, Iohannes Arcimboldus, described Bessarion as 'tutto Veneziano' in a letter to Galeazzo Maria Sforza.<sup>18</sup> Although this was not intended as a compliment from the perspective of the Milanese, it indicates that the cardinal was widely recognised for his empathy with the Republic. Venice even supported his bid for the papal tiara in 1471.<sup>19</sup> It is not surprising, then, that given this mutual admiration, Bessarion thought of Venice when he was casting about for a home for his books.

The cardinal's choice of Venice as the beneficiary of his donation could also have been motivated by his desire to apply political pressure to the Republic. Bessarion had campaigned throughout his career for a crusade to be launched against the Ottoman Turks, and a Venetian initiative was critical to the success of this project. At the Council of Mantua (1458-59) Pope Pius II appointed Bessarion and Nicholas of Cusa to engage in negotiations for a Venetian contribution to their crusade against the Ottomans. In 1463 Pius sent the cardinal to Venice as apostolic legate, with the mission to muster support for another crusade attempt. Bessarion stayed for a year, consorting with the Venetian notables and exercising his right to vote in an election. He succeeded in persuading the Venetians to go to war as early as 29 July 1463. They embarked on a conflict with the Ottoman Turks which would last until 1479.<sup>20</sup> By donating his library to the Republic, Bessarion was perhaps making a gesture which he hoped would encourage Venice to continue their participation in the war with the Ottomans.

An argument is often advanced that Bessarion was motivated to move his library collection from Rome to Venice in 1468 because of the then Pope Paul II's hostility to humanism.<sup>21</sup> However, a re-examination of this idea reveals that there are many points of weakness. This theory is dependent on

---

<sup>18</sup> '...conoscendo esso cardinale callido, astuto e venetiano...' Milan, Archivio di Stato, carteggio sforzesco, Roma, filia 69.

<sup>19</sup> Zorzi, 'Bessarione e i codici greci', 106.

<sup>20</sup> Zorzi, 'Bessarione e Venezia', 204.

<sup>21</sup> Zorzi in 'Bessarione e Venezia' claims that Bessarion had good reason to be uneasy about curial links between San Giorgio Maggiore and the popes (San Giorgio had a history of curial control from the 1430s when Gabriele Condulmer, later Pope Eugenius IV, was its commendatory abbot) since Paul II had made his hostility to Neoplatonism and the Roman academies abundantly clear by 1467. The monastery might not have made a secure refuge for a library dedicated to these themes. Zorzi, 'Bessarione e Venezia', 209.

Paul's reputation for philistinism, which is based on the influential account of his life written by the aggrieved humanist Bartolomeo Platina.<sup>22</sup> His assessment of the pope was understandably coloured by the harsh treatment he had endured at Paul's hands after the discovery of a plot to overthrow the papacy. All the men involved were connected to Bessarion in some way – indeed, the cardinal even made a special plea to the pope for the release of Platina.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless it seems unlikely that the cardinal was tainted by association for long. It is argued by some scholars, such as the cardinal's more recent biographer, Giuseppe Coluccia, that Bessarion feared some sort of reprisal from the pope because of his link with the alleged conspirators.<sup>24</sup> However, within twelve months the last of the accused was released, and several of the conspirators were reinstated to their curial positions, so it is hard to argue that a peripheral witness would have been the target of Paul's hostility. In Chapter 1 I suggest the opposite: that Paul II was very much a patron of humanism, and that in many respects he advocated the cardinal's agenda, although the propagandistic success of Platina's *Lives* has influenced subsequent interpretations of his attitude towards scholarship. It is arguable that Bessarion actually shared intellectual attitudes with Paul II and with Venice and that this was a triangular relationship that was manifested in the donation of the library to the Republic. After all, it was the pope who approved the change of bequest. Contrary to conventional opinion, which interprets the transfer of the library to Venice as an attempt to remove the books from Paul II's orbit in Rome, the donation may have been evidence of a closer relationship with the pope than historians have traditionally acknowledged.

An additional factor in the donation to Venice may have been the fact that it was Paul's native state and that the pope was performing a balancing act between appeasing his 'patria' and nurturing the sovereignty of the papacy. Scholars have not previously considered this as a potential element in the equation. With the gesture of this generous gift, Bessarion may have been assisting Paul II in reconciling the papacy and the Signoria. Venice had a tradition of seeing itself as a chosen city of God

---

<sup>22</sup> Platina, *The Lives of the Popes*, 277.

<sup>23</sup> Cardinals Gonzaga and Bessarion made a special plea to the pope on 20 April 1470. Dunston, 'Pope Paul II and the Humanists', 303.

<sup>24</sup> Coluccia, *Basilio Bessarione*, 230.

and an heir to the Byzantine Empire..<sup>25</sup> Frequently this clashed with the papal self-image of sacred and, increasingly, temporal authority. When the pope was a Venetian himself, as was the case with Pope Paul II, these tensions were enhanced by the expectations both Rome and the Republic held for papal favour. In Paul's case these relations had become fragile during his time as Cardinal Pietro Barbo when the then pope, Pius II appointed him bishop of Padua in 1459 over the Signoria choice of Gregorio Correr. Paul was forced to renounce his claim in 1460, and a personal resentment towards the Venetian government began to fester..<sup>26</sup> As pope, Paul developed a sense of paranoia, believing that envoys from Venice were sent to spy on him. He and the Republic then struggled over control of the state of Rimini. To the irritation of the Venetians, the pope paid only lip service to a crusade effort and attempted to thwart the Signoria's taxation of the clergy to fund such a campaign..<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Pope Paul II did make gestures to appease his native state, and the goodwill Bessarion's donation generated towards an ambassador of the pope may have contributed towards these gestures. Paul identified himself as Venetian throughout his pontificate; in 1470 he established a *studium generale* in Venice; and he made three visits to the city between 1464 and his death..<sup>28</sup> Given the lengths to which Bessarion went to protect the interests of the other popes whom he served, such as Pius II, it is not inconceivable that his donation to Venice was intended to help consolidate papal power.

### **Marc.Lat.Z.14: The Act of Donation Document**

The formal bequest of the library to the Republic of Venice was transacted via an elaborate document that served to formalize the donation. It is suggested here that this document served a ceremonial purpose establishing the significance of the donation and the credentials of Bessarion as a western

---

<sup>25</sup> Robertson, 'Paul II: *Zentihomo de Venecia e Pontifico*', 147. Robertson cites Paolo Prodi, 'The Structure and Organization of the Church in Renaissance Venice: Suggestions for Research', in J. R. Hale, ed., *Renaissance Venice*, London 1973, 409-30.

<sup>26</sup> Robertson stresses the bitterness that this conflict generated in, 'Paul II: *Zentihomo de Venecia e Pontifico*', 154.

<sup>27</sup> Robertson, 'Paul II: *Zentihomo de Venecia e Pontifico*', 158-62. Primary sources from the Archivio di Stato, Milan, Archivio Sforzesco and from the Archivio di Stato, Venice are cited to support this statement in Robertson's chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Robertson, 'Paul II: *Zentihomo de Venecia e Pontifico*', 151-72.



patron. The document is bound into a volume in the Biblioteca Marciana, datable to 1468. It consists of 66 folios, measuring 250 x 170mm. It is stored in a copper plated box which has three iron clasps and is decorated with a tooled foliage pattern. On the left of the front cover the arms of S. Marco have been embossed and on the right are those of Bessarion..<sup>29</sup> Above the coats of arms are four lines of text in gold reading,

INDEX LIBRORUM VARIUSQUE LINGUA/E BASILICAE DIVI MARCI PER  
BIS/ARIONEM CARDINALEM EPISCOPUS PA/TRIARCHA  
CONSTANTINOPOLITANUM DICATORUM..<sup>30</sup>

The contents of the volume consists of a letter making the donation to the doge Cristoforo Moro (1390-1471) (Figure 41); a request to Pope Paul II to revoke the original bequest to the monastery of S. Giorgio Maggiore; the institution of the donation; an index of Greek books and an index of Latin books (Figures 42 and 43). The document has multiple functions. Firstly it is ceremonial: liberally illustrated with *bianchi girari*, putti and gold initials. The letter to the doge is particularly elaborate with a margin of vine scroll on a red, blue, green and gold background framing the first page of the text. At the top and bottom of the left-hand border are two medallions containing naked putti playing the harp and the lute in a landscape. In the lower frieze the winged lion of St Mark stands in a landscape, one paw in a stream, holding the book symbolising the Evangelist's scripture. Flanking the beast are the coats of arms of Bessarion and Moro supported by two mermen blowing trumpets. The right-hand border is also decorated with *bianchi girari* (a white vine scroll pattern, typical of north Italian manuscript illumination) but in the centre there is a blank space, possibly the site of another scene with a Cupid or a coat of arms. Each section of the book is introduced with a gold initial on a background of *bianchi girari*. This was meant to be a lavish manuscript and indicates the importance Bessarion invested in this donation. The collection had to be celebrated in this document in order to impress on the Venetians

<sup>29</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z. 14.

<sup>30</sup> 'Index of the dedicated books in various languages for the basilica of the Divine Mark by Bessarion Cardinal bishop, Patriarch of Constantinople.'

the richness of the treasure they were receiving and to inspire the degree of reverence which the library would have merited.

Determining to what extent Bessarion's commission for this document was unusual in its degree of decoration is problematic. Legal documents and charters are not frequently studied for their illustration. In addition, the texts are scattered throughout national, local and private collections making access complicated. Documents also suffer a high attrition rate: they disappear in fires, vandalism, thefts, misplacements and sales. Bessarion's Act was closely linked to the papal license which permitted him to make the bequest. As mentioned, it included Pope Paul's permission to revoke the donation to S. Giorgio Maggiore and to bestow the books on the Republic. It seems likely that one of the functions of the elaborate decoration of the document was a bid to identify the cardinal's donation with papal authority.

Secondly it is a legal transaction, evidenced by the many notaries and ecclesiastical officials bearing witness or leaving their signature. The notaries 'L. Dathus, R(omano) D. Cardinal, B. de Reate and L. Pathum' all signed the document on folio 8.<sup>31</sup> This was another instance in which the textual content was lent authority by the elaborate nature of the decoration. There were pressing reasons for these legal measures, not least of which was to secure the approval of Paul II. The original bequest to S. Giorgio Maggiore had to be revoked officially, and this is repeated in the letters to Moro and Paul as well as the Institution of the Donation. Then there were conditions attached to the donation which the Venetians were to be legally bound to observe. The books must be housed in a library constructed for that specific purpose.<sup>32</sup> Bessarion repeatedly states that the library must be easy to access and

---

<sup>31</sup> 'In fine vero bullae apparabent trae alterius manu scriptae sub plica: sic dicentes L dathus extra vero dictas plicam apparabant aliae trae est alterius manu scriptae sic dicentes: Gratis pro Rmo d. Cardinali et paulo infra B de Reate. A tergo ispius bullae apparebant aliae litterae alterius manus: sic dicentes Rta apud me L pathum.'

<sup>32</sup> '...in libraria ibidem conficienda seu facta aut constructa...' (fol. 13).

convenient...<sup>33</sup> Most importantly Venice was prohibited from selling or alienating any of the volumes in the collection...<sup>34</sup> And not least, the document functions as the index of the collection. The two lists begin with illuminated initials in gold on *bianchi girari*, and each item starts with a large capital alternating in red and blue ink. By commissioning this interplay of words and decoration, Bessarion was giving visual weight to the concept of the bequest as an inalienable package.

This was not a post mortem bequest. In 1469 fifteen mules carried thirty boxes full of Bessarion's books to Venice from Rome...<sup>35</sup> It was unusual to give away a library collection before death, and it raises questions about the use Bessarion made of his books. His original bequest to S. Giorgio Maggiore in 1463 was made as a 'donatio inter vivos' whereby Bessarion reserved the use of his books during his lifetime. Five years later he was willing to surrender them immediately. If these were texts he worked from then why was he able to do without them after 1468? His residence remained in Rome and his academy continued to function. The answer may lie in the dates. In 1463 the cardinal was enjoying a good relationship with Pius II and had reached the culmination of his political career. His position was secure. By 1468 events in Rome had changed this benign climate. Even though the cardinal was not implicated, an academy like Bessarion's was at the centre of a conspiracy to oust Pope Paul II. Bessarion may have wanted to demonstrate his loyalty to Paul by making a donation to the pope's homeland – a contribution to the papal efforts to smooth over relations between Venice and Rome.

## The Collection

---

<sup>33</sup> '...donare; ut facilius; et commodius ingenia plurimorum illustrentur. Et ipsi libri publici forent; et posteritati servirent...' (fol. 12).

<sup>34</sup> 'Neque possint: aut eis liceat praefatos libros aliquomodo vendere, vel alienare: nec illos vel aliquem illorum extra dictam civitatem Venetiarum aliquot modo alicui unquam concedere: vel praestare: sive mutare...' (fol. 14).

<sup>35</sup> Zorzi, 'Bessarione e i codici greci', 108.

Bessarion's collection is usually treated as two separate libraries: one in the Greek language and the other in Latin. Many historians define 1453 as a watershed in Cardinal Bessarion's collecting habits. Scholars treat this year, when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks, as the moment when Bessarion started to focus on preserving any and all Greek texts on which he could lay his hands. It is seen as a campaign to save Byzantine culture, a culture that the cardinal feared would be destroyed by the occupying Ottoman forces. The scholar Marino Zorzi concentrates on these motives when assessing Bessarion's collecting strategy. His chapter 'Cardinale Bessarione e la sua biblioteca' in *I Luoghi della Memoria Scritta: Manoscritti, incunaboli, libri a stampa di Biblioteche statali Italiane*.<sup>36</sup> analyzes the Greek collection in the context of Bessarion's scholarship. Zorzi notes the predominance of ancient writers and Byzantine theological texts and identifies the goals of the library: to transcribe the most important Greek texts; to preserve Greek texts from destruction; to make them more widely known; and to achieve greater Greek penetration of the western European continent. Zorzi's approach, however, is weakened by his cursory attention to the Latin collection, which he suggests was put together in less of a hurry and with less preoccupation with ancient writers. This is typical of how the Latin collection generally is either overlooked or perceived to be fundamentally different in content. It is argued here that there were actually many points of similarity between the collections and that in both cases Bessarion was systematic and selective, consciously driving the character of his complete library.

In this section I propose to consider both collections as a whole, drawing together the two isolated areas of study to demonstrate the multiple factors influencing the nature of this book collection. A re-assessment of Bessarion's collection from a chronological and contextual perspective demonstrates that he had a methodical rather than reactionary approach to the development of his library. It can be argued that one of the principle results of this approach was to create a library that served a western, specifically Italian, scholarship. Even though this aspiration could not have emerged in Bessarion's

---

<sup>36</sup> Zorzi, 'Il Cardinale Bessarione e la sua biblioteca', in *I Luoghi della Memoria Scritta: Manoscritti, incunaboli, libri a stampa di Biblioteche statali Italiane*, 391-410.

collecting habits before 1440 and his emigration to Italy, the early texts he acquired laid a foundation for his philosophies and scholarship that he would capitalize on when he established himself in Rome.

It is clear that Bessarion's collection resonated with western intellectual interests from its inception. In a letter, which mentions Bessarion, from the Latin scholar Ambrogio Traversari to Filippo Pieruzzi at the time of the Council of Florence (1439), Traversari writes,

I am now familiar with the bishop of Nicaea, a man of singular merit and culture. He is full of brains although younger than the others, in fact he's in his thirties. Having questioned him for a long time on manuscripts, I found that he had not carried many with him, had left the grand majority of them at Modone: I questioned him about this and he described to me that he had left there two volumes of Strabo, texts totally new to us. He also has many other works but unknown to us..<sup>37</sup>

It was this fledgling collection that so impressed Traversari. As early as his period of study with George Gemistos Pletho, Bessarion was collecting works by Ptolemy, Strabo and minor Greek mathematicians, all of which would capture the attention of the western scholars. In his article 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', Elpidio Mioni points to the continuity of Bessarion's collection. He retained an interest in these Greek authors throughout his life. According to Mioni, he also copied manuscripts of works by Aristotle and Archimedes during this time..<sup>38</sup> Although Bessarion had already acquired a sizeable library by the time he began instruction with George Gemistos Pletho, it was a library typical of a Basilian monk: rich in religious texts and patristic commentaries. It was under Pletho that his collecting habits expanded to include profane literature with a particular interest in philosophy and science, a focus which would continue to shape his collection after he came to Italy.

Texts from Plutarch, Xenophon, Lucian and the laws of Plato (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.

---

<sup>37</sup> Quoted and trans. in Mioni, 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', 63 from L. Mehus, *Ambrosii Traversari latinae epistolae*, I, Florence 1759, letter 30. Sadly, I have found no further evidence to explain the connection with Modon (modern Methoni). As a long-time colony of Venice, it is possible that this is an indication that Bessarion had some sort of relationship with the Republic from an early stage in his career.

<sup>38</sup> Mioni, 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', 65.

526 and Marc.gr.z.523) date from this period in Byzantium and are largely autograph..<sup>39</sup> These were all authors to whom scholars were turning in the West, and Bessarion provided a conduit for the transmission of such texts to Italy.

When Bessarion was tutored in Pletho's community on the island of Mistra, where he studied the liberal arts with an emphasis on mathematics, he developed an interest in Greek ancient texts. In his article Elpidio Mioni asserts that at this stage Bessarion's knowledge of Latin was minimal and that there is no evidence that he collected Roman authors. However, John Monfasani has provided a convincing case in his recent book *Bessarion Scholasticus* for the young man's awareness and appreciation of western Scholasticism in the form of the books by Thomas Aquinas that he collected before his departure to Rome..<sup>40</sup> Although there were myriad bibliophiles in Byzantium, I have found no evidence of a widespread interest in western texts among them. Bessarion's inclusion of western authors in his collection seems to have been unusual. His Greek volumes were typical of the erudite Constantinopolitan collector, for example the scholar George of Cyprus's library included Plato, Aelius, Aristides, Demosthenes as well as liturgical and theological writers such as Gregory of Nazianzus..<sup>41</sup>

Pletho instilled in Bessarion an appreciation of Plato and Neoplatonic writers which would endure throughout his life and characterise a significant proportion of his collection, becoming the basis of his intellectual agenda in the West. This interest would develop into a passion after the Council of Florence in the wake of Pletho's text *De Differentiis*, which ignited the debate among the scholars in Italy over the comparison of Aristotle and Plato. The theme would flower in the aftermath of the Fall

---

<sup>39</sup> Mioni, 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', 65. See also Zanetti, *Latina et Italica*, 284-85 and Leporace and Mioni, *Cento codici bessarionei*, 53-54, n. 50.

<sup>40</sup> Monfasani's recent book, *Bessarion Scholasticus*, looks at Bessarion's interest in Scholastic literature and proposes that he was well grounded in medieval philosophy as well as the more modern Platonic movement.

<sup>41</sup> Staikos, *The History of the Library*, 430.

of Constantinople of 1453 with Bessarion's collection of Neoplatonic writers and his own book *In calumniatorem platonis*.

In the years before the Fall of Constantinople other patterns in Bessarion's book collecting can be identified that demonstrate that the cardinal's agenda was shaped by his political interests, which were newly focused on the West. The move from Constantinople to Rome in 1440 had a dramatic impact on the shape of the collection. Bessarion began to form an extensive library of books in Latin. As discussed in the section on the donation, the relationship between the Latin and Greek collections is crucial in determining Bessarion's motives as a cultural patron. By looking at the library as a single collection of books in two languages characterised by the common subject matter of history, philosophy, rhetoric and theology, we can see Bessarion in the process of developing a library that reflected the scholarly nature of his western environment. The pivotal move to Rome facilitated an expansion of his book collecting activities rather than a change of focus away from the Greek collection. Bessarion continued to collect mainly history (Herodotus, Thucydides and Cassius Dio) as well as philosophy (Plato, Plotinus and Proclus).

Not only was Bessarion preparing a legacy of books for the Italians, he was also motivated to collect works that echoed his political interests as well as the debates that he engaged in. Bessarion was preoccupied with the Union of the East and West Churches, and the library reflects this in the acquisitions from the 1440s onwards in both languages, for example the *Acta Concilii florentini* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.120) in Greek and the *Opera Domini Reverendissimi de spiritu sancto* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.135) in Latin.

In the tradition of examining Bessarion's library as two separate collections, the scholar Concetta Bianca has considered Bessarion's Latin collection most extensively. She posits that these books

reflect the cardinal's personal interests more accurately because he was not under the same pressure to 'save' Latin culture and could therefore be more selective in the acquisition or rejection of titles..<sup>42</sup>

According to Bianca, the Latin library represented the theological debates, philosophy and religious subjects in which the cardinal was involved. This observation is doubtless accurate – Bessarion would not have collected works that he was not interested in. The library was characterised by the humanist movement emerging in Renaissance Italy. One of Bessarion's first acquisitions after his move to Rome was a Cicero copied in Florence in 1441, containing *De natura deorum* and *De Officiis*..<sup>43</sup> Bianca argues that Cicero's works were standard texts for every western humanist's library..<sup>44</sup> In 1445 Bessarion commissioned a copy of Cicero's *In Verres* and the *Philippics* from the Florentine scribe Petrus Stroza, as well as works by Aulus Gellius, and Pliny..<sup>45</sup>

However, there is little evidence that Bessarion was collecting the Greek books in any more of a haphazard fashion than he applied to the acquisition of the Latin works or that he was unwilling or unable to indulge his personal preferences for particular subjects. During the 1440s he was expanding his collection rather than shifting focus away from the acquisition of Greek texts. For example, as head of the Basilian Order in Italy he had access to the libraries of many monasteries in the south. From these institutions the cardinal acquired works such as the *Acts and Letters of the Apostles* translated from the Hebrew into Greek (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.7); a collection of laws written in 1175 in the circle of Roger II's court in Sicily (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.172); and the *Lives of the Saints*, written in 1279 in the reign of Charles I of Sicily (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana,

---

<sup>42</sup> Bianca, *Da Bisanzio a Roma*, 46.

<sup>43</sup> This manuscript (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.414) is inscribed with the date 1441. See Zanetti, *Latina et italica*, 166; Marcon, 'Miniatures in Latin Manuscripts', 389, number 8; Bianca, *Da Bisanzio a Roma*, 54.

<sup>44</sup> Bianca, *Da Bisanzio a Roma*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z. 430 is inscribed with the date 1445 and the name 'Petrus Stroza absolvit Florentiae...' on folio 220v; Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 120. For more information on Petrus Stroza and Bessarion, Bianca cites A. de la Mare, *Messer Piero Strozzi, a Florentine Priest and Scribe, in Calligraphy and Palaeography*, ed. A.S. Osley, London 1965, 55-68.



Marc.gr.z.362)..<sup>46</sup> The theological theme of these acquisitions is entirely compatible with the character of the Latin collection, and this continuity supports the theory that the Latin and Greek libraries should be perceived as a single collection with common motives driving the acquisition policy.

In the first half of the 1450s Bessarion moved to Bologna as a papal legate. Studies of the cardinal's library tend to focus on the development of the Greek collection in this period, implying that the momentous events of 1453 dominated Bessarion's collecting habits. However, the Bolognese appointment was a very formative period for Bessarion's Latin collection. The entire library became so important to the cardinal that he took the trouble to send it to Florence during a phase of unrest in Bologna in 1452..<sup>47</sup> It was here too that he established relationships with renowned scribes such as Iohannes Caldarifex and illuminators such as Giovanni da Rimini, who decorated a copy of Lactantius (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.40), which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter..<sup>48</sup> This phase of collecting reflects an effort to consolidate Pope Nicholas V's political mandate – the cardinal acquired many books in ecclesiastical law, as well as decrees and bulls..<sup>49</sup> Using the inscriptions that the cardinal made on the flyleaf of his books, scholars have been able to identify rough dates for certain acquisitions..<sup>50</sup> The phrase 'liber meus' is proposed by Bianca to relate to the period of the cardinal's Bologna appointment (1450-55). Many of these fulfill a practical role in his duties, and their acquisition provides evidence that Bessarion tailored his collection to reflect and enhance his duties as a western cardinal. For example, he bought many western legal texts for his library during a period of consultation on issues of penal procedure with Barbazza – the famous Sicilian legalist who wrote *Tractatus de praestantia Cardinalium*. Works by St Ambrose (Venice,

---

<sup>46</sup> Mioni, 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', 71-72. For more literature on these volumes see Leporace and Mioni, *Cento Codici Bessarionei*, 30, 43-45.

<sup>47</sup> Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 125. This transfer is confirmed by a letter from Niccolò Perotti to Poggio Bracciolini in which he says that while he was in Rome all the books were packed up and sent to Florence – see Mercati, *Per la cronologia della vita e degli scritti di Niccolò Perotti*, 144-46.

<sup>48</sup> Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 128. See Chapter 5 on manuscript illumination.

<sup>49</sup> Bianca, *Da Bisanzio a Roma*, 63.

<sup>50</sup> For example, books in which the cardinal identified himself as *Cardinalis Tusculanus* must have been acquired after 23 April 1449 when he received the title. The same is the case for the title, *Episcopopus Sabinensis*, by which Bessarion was referred after October 1468.

Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.21) were secured from the estate of the professor of canon and civic law at Bologna, Battista Manzolini, after he was imprisoned on a charge of conspiracy against the state.<sup>51</sup> Actual texts on law included the *Lectura* of Bartolo (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.201); the *Decretals* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.177) and two volumes of the *Speculum iuris* by Guglielmo Durante (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.215).<sup>52</sup>

Bessarion invested a great deal of interest in western scholarship which manifested itself in this period through his attention to the famous university of Bologna, and this interest is demonstrated by the books which he collected during his appointment in the city. These included philosophical texts such as *Flores totius logicae* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.302) and *Super libris phisicorum* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.255), which reflected the university tradition in teaching philosophy. This symbiotic relationship between this bastion of western learning and Bessarion's book collection extended to the cardinal's interest in the wellbeing of the university, which is discussed in Chapter 1. Among Bessarion's major commissions in Bologna was his request for the entire university's reading list to be copied for his collection.

While in the north, Bessarion also maintained contacts with the Roman scholars and continued to collect literature associated with humanism. It was during the Bolognese period that he produced a Latin translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Clearly Bessarion was focused on making ancient Greek texts more accessible to the West. His collection was being shaped by the needs and demands of western intellectuals to whom the cardinal was catering. During the time in Bologna it is clear that his interest in the Latin classics evolved, and he had several texts copied and illuminated. Among them were Ovid's *Works* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.444) in 1452; excerpts from Virgil

---

<sup>51</sup> Manzolini died on 14 January 1454; Bianca, *Da Bisanzio a Roma*, 72. See also Nasalli Rocca, *Il cardinale Bessarione*, 35; and Bacchelli, *La legazione bolognese*, 146.

<sup>52</sup> Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 133, nn. 122-24.

(Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.440); and a Vitruvius (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.463)..<sup>53</sup>

But the cardinal did not neglect his theological interests in Bologna, a theme that ran through both his Greek and Latin collections. He continued to build his rich collection of ecclesiastical authorities such as the writings of St Augustine and Thomas of Aquinas. Bessarion demonstrated an interest in contemporary ecclesiastical affairs that were topical in Italy, acquiring texts such as the *Acta Concilii Basiliensis* by his colleague Cardinal Capranica (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.166). Pursuing these theological and philosophical interests during his Bolognese years, he ordered seven volumes of writings by St Thomas Aquinas to be copied in 1453 (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.116, 117, 118, 124, 125, 126, 127)..<sup>54</sup> It is clear that during his appointment in Bologna, Bessarion was focused on his role in the Roman Catholic Church, and the interest in western theology complemented the cardinal's programme of local patronage. He established the monastery of Corpus Domini; built at his expense the Cappella dell'Assunzione in the church of the Madonna del Monte (which was once decorated with a fresco of Bessarion and Niccolò Perotti) and restored the church of the Madonna di San Luca..<sup>55</sup> Bessarion's work in Bologna ended up being an integrated programme that resulted in establishing his position as a western patron.

While Bessarion was in Bologna, Constantinople fell to Mehmet II. In 1453 Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini lyrically described the context in which Bessarion was collecting:

What shall I say of the countless books, as yet unknown to the Latins, which were there [in Constantinople]? Alas, how many names of great men will now perish! Here is a second death

---

<sup>53</sup> Bianca, 'La formazione della Biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 135.

<sup>54</sup> Bianca, 'La formazione della Biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 132.

<sup>55</sup> Bacchelli, 'La legazione del cardinale Bessarione (1450-1455)', 143. See chapter 3 of the present dissertation.

for Homer and for Plato too. Where are we now to seek the philosophers' and the poets' works of genius? The fount of the Muses has been destroyed..<sup>56</sup>

On one level the cardinal's efforts to collect Greek texts reveal that he shared Piccolomini's perspective. However, it is suggested here that Bessarion's behaviour implied that at least an equal focus of his concern was on the consequences of this destruction for the West. Traditionally Bessarion's collection of Greek manuscripts is perceived to be a reaction to the assault on his heritage in the form of the Ottoman Turks. It can, however, be argued that his general interest in Latin ancient classics, which emerged in Bologna, was an influential factor in the development of his Greek library at the same time with its focus on history and philosophy. He collected the Greek works, *Problemata* of Aristotle (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.259); Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *De Compositione verborum* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.429) and the *Histories* by Diogenes (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.372) among others. At this stage the Latin and Greek book collections complemented each other. From the book dealer Giovanni Aurispa, Bessarion acquired titles such as Planudes' *Anthology* and the tenth-century copy of the *Athenaeus Naucratis* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.447)..<sup>57</sup> Based on the evolving shape of Bessarion's Greek collection, it might be concluded that his motives were more complex than previously assessed. An aspect of his agenda seems to have been to represent to the western world the past reputation of a nation that had once been so great that it produced these texts. Secondly Bessarion's collection was a statement that the empire remained great in the present even if the physical Byzantium no longer existed. This mass of Greek literature that he collected exerted the power of the Byzantines through its influence on humanists and leaders in the West.

Some of our most definitive evidence for Bessarion's collecting strategy can be found in an examination of the collection's evolution during the cardinal's later years. Lotte Labowsky has made the most comprehensive contribution to the study of Cardinal Bessarion's library in her book

---

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Setton, *Papacy*, II, 150.

<sup>57</sup> Mioni, 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', 72-73. See also, idem, *Cento codici bessarionei*, 56.

*Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana: Six Early Inventories*, published in 1979. By looking closely at six inventories, compiled in 1468, 1474, 1524, 1543, 1545/6 and 1575, she examines the development of the classification system which characterised what would be the foundation collection of the Biblioteca Marciana. The inventories of 1468 and 1474 are the most interesting for this study because a close examination of the differences between them offers valuable evidence for the evolution of the library.

In 1468 746 books became the legal property of San Marco, Venice. However, far fewer would have actually been sent to the Republic as Bessarion retained some for his personal use during his lifetime. By the time of the second inventory in 1474 the collection had grown considerably because the cardinal had continued to acquire books up to his death in 1472. There was also a large consignment held in Urbino by Duke Federico da Montefeltro. A letter exists (Labowsky does not identify to whom it was sent), copied for Annibale Olivieri degli Abati in 1785 requesting the:

Transfer of several locked chests with books which had been deposited at the convent of Santa Clara by the Cardinal of Nicaea, to the Secretary of the Signoria of Venice, enacted in the presence of Count Federigo da Montefeltre, who had been asked to be kind enough to take on this task on behalf of the College of Cardinals, the executors of the testament of the aforementioned Cardinal. The count was instructed to send one of these chests, locked as it was, to Rome into the custody of the aforementioned College. This was done and carried out in his presence and in addition an inventory was made of all the books in these chests, in respect of which the Count, even against the instructions given by the Cardinals, had a detailed statement made of the quantity of books in each chest, which are also particularized in the legal document drawn up concerning the aforementioned transfer. 28 February 1474..<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> MS Pesaro, Biblioteca Olivieriana, MS 443, no. 949, ff. 425-425v; printed and translated in Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 137.

There is also evidence that Venice was making efforts to recover books which it perceived to be part of the Bessarion bequest..<sup>59</sup> In total they had found approximately 265 extra manuscripts by the time the 1474 inventory was compiled..<sup>60</sup>

Although not the ostensible aim of the study, Labowsky's work demonstrates that Bessarion's donation was organic – it continued to grow after the official bequest. This has implications for the cardinal's collecting habits. Do his motivations become more self-conscious in the years 1469-72? He knew he was building a grand legacy, and this may have been reflected in the books he chose and commissioned. By comparing the titles in Labowsky's Table of Concordance I<sup>61</sup> I looked at the manuscripts which featured in columns Ag (Inventory 1468 – Greek) and Al (Inventory 1468 – Latin) against those which appear in column B (Inventory 1474). When a manuscript is listed in the later inventory but not in the earlier I have assumed it is an addition to the 1468 list or a book which the cardinal retained for his personal use between 1468 and 1472. Over a third of the Greek additions and over half of the Latin are religious in nature. There is almost nothing new by Plato or the Neoplatonists, although the Greek inventory includes six manuscripts of works by Aristotle. Acquisitions of books on the sciences drop substantially along with the classics. This contrasts with the 1468 composition of the collection which is dominated by classical texts and Neoplatonic Christian writers such as Dionysius the Areopagite. What accounts for this change?

Bessarion's circumstances and preoccupations, which were firmly rooted in the West at this point, should be looked at to answer this question. The Franciscan Bernardino di Bevagna copied the translation of *Metaphysics* by Bonet for him in 1468 (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.304);

---

<sup>59</sup> Cumque per totam Italiam notum sit studium et opera prestita a nobis in recuperando residuum librorum dimissorum et donatorum ecclesie nostre Sancti Marci per quondam Reverendissimum dominum Cardinalem prefatum... (Valentinelli, *Bibliotheca Manuscripta ad S. Marcum Venetiarum*, ed. G. Valentinelli, vol. I, 1868-1873, 33, n. 1; printed in Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 126).

<sup>60</sup> The following conclusions are based on the data that I analysed in the inventories published by Labowsky.

<sup>61</sup> Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 428-53.

Theodoricus Wulf of Lubeck produced a copy of the letters of Gregory the Great (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.82); and Iohannes Caldarifex did *De civitate Dei* by St Augustine (Rome, BAV, Urb.lat.78).<sup>62</sup> Bessarion inherited Cardinal Carvajal's library in 1469, increasing his collection of political and ecclesiastical texts with a focus on civil law.<sup>63</sup> He acquired his own law books independently during this period, including the *Decretals* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.183) and the letters of Ivo and Hildebert (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.84). Simultaneously, the cardinal became involved in the debate about temporal benefices which resurfaced during the pontificate of Paul II. He collected several volumes related to this issue including three books by his contemporary Rodrigo Sánchez di Arévalo, who wrote extensively on ecclesiastical poverty.<sup>64</sup> The focus on religious subjects in both the Greek and Latin collections demonstrates that, at least in Bessarion's final years, there was a common strategy for acquisitions in both languages.

## Acquisition

Bessarion collected the bulk of his library while occupying various ecclesiastical positions in the West. The perk of this career was that it gave him the means of acquisition. Firstly, the appointments that the cardinal held provided him with substantial financial resources, giving him the money with which to enlarge his collection. He used merchants, such as Leonardus and Lamponicus Bibliopolae as well as the influence of friends to acquire books.<sup>65</sup> He did this by subsidizing a host of agents and purchasing the fruits of their research. Among his agents were the Venetian Francisco Barbaro and the Greek Michael Apostolis. The relationship with these men was more than that of servant and commissioner:

---

<sup>62</sup> Bianca, *Da Bisanzio a Roma*, 100.

<sup>63</sup> Bessarion wrote the epitaph for Carvajal's tomb in the Church of S. Marcello; Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 154. See also Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, I, 278.

<sup>64</sup> One of these was *De remediis afflictarum ecclesiarum* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.90) which was dedicated to Bessarion and was illustrated with his coat of arms; Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 156.

<sup>65</sup> The most notable among these friends were Niccolò Perotti, Leonardo Bruni, Flavio Biondi, Francesco Filelfo, Lorenzo Valla, Poggio Bracciolini, Guarino Veronese and Marsilio Ficino. Mioni, 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', 72.

Bessarion frequently made reference to their amicable relationships. In a letter to Barbaro the cardinal expresses his pleasure and gratitude as well as their friendship:

I received the letters and the Tacitus...The second was more pleasing to me, I do not express this easily ... [as] the others have filled me with love for you which I very much hold dear..<sup>66</sup>

Later in the same letter he is even more explicit:

Indeed it is permitted for me to boast greatly, because you combine in my letters not only the books, which I choose, which I was seeking, but also the closeness of a very great friendship I keep with me..<sup>67</sup>

Barbaro procured books for Bessarion to own and to borrow, presumably for copying by his own scriptorium. The cardinal wrote again to Barbaro,

If your Cornelius [Tacitus] was not silent, he could report back to you how humanely he was handled by us, how liberally he was treated, how happily he was hosted by us for five months already....<sup>68</sup>

Bessarion's methods of acquisition were also directly related to his western political career in that the appointments he was granted by the various popes provided him with the opportunities to gather more books. In 1449 when he became bishop of Mazzara in Sicily he acquired the six volumes of the *Dictionarium morale* and *Quaestiones in sententias* by Pietro da Candia (better known as Pope

---

<sup>66</sup> 'Accepi litteras et una Cornelium Tacitum....Uter mihi fuerit iucundior, haud facile expresserim; quippe alter sitim, quam iam diu visendi sui animo meo excitaverat, uberrime ac plenissime sedavit, alterae me ad te amandum, quem ante summopere diligebam, compleverunt.' Letter 26, Bessarion to Francisco Barbaro, 9 May 1453, Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III. Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>67</sup> 'Mihi certe licet summopere gloriari, quod unis meis litteris non solum librum, quem optabam, consecutus fuerim, verum etiam tanti viri amicitiam mihi conciliaverim.' Letter 26, Bessarion to Francisco Barbaro, 9 May 1453, Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III. Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>68</sup> 'Si Conelius tuus tacitus non esset, posset tibi referre, quam humaniter a nobis susceptus, quam liberaliter tractatus, quam hilariter quantum iam mensem nobiscum hospitatus sit, quem interea filium, quam ingenuum et liberalem ac apud nos dimiserit.' Letter 27, Bessarion to Francesco Barbaro, October 1453, Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III. Translation Laura Bolick.



Alexander V), that had belonged to the cardinal's predecessor, Giovanni Rosa di Caltagirone..<sup>69</sup> Later, when Bessarion held the position of archimandrite of San Salvatore di Messina (1456-62) he received *The Sacred Life of Gregory the Pope* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.357)..<sup>70</sup> Bessarion may have also picked up manuscripts as gifts or requisitions from the Franciscan and Basilian churches under his protection.

Apostolic trips, for example to Germany (1460), also resulted in the growth of the collection by exposing the cardinal to a selection of books beyond the borders of the Italian states. In Germany he bought four volumes of works by Nicholas of Lyra from a Nuremberg monastery (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.18, 23, 27 and 30) and two volumes of works by William of Auvergne (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.305 and 306)..<sup>71</sup> There was much activity in 1461 during his mission to Vienna where he acquired a book on arithmetic and geometry (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.332), and where two political works were dedicated to the cardinal: *De naufragio suo* by Niccolò Sagundino and *Summa de casibus conscientiae* by the Franciscan friar Gratian. In addition, another Franciscan friar, Hellfericus of Babhusen copied out a commentary by Duns Scotus for Bessarion (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.109) while the cardinal was in the Austrian capital..<sup>72</sup>

While Bessarion seems to have been constructing a western humanist library, there was also an opportunistic element to his acquisition programme which nonetheless does not appear to have

---

<sup>69</sup> Caltagirone acquired both books before he became bishop. The first volume was written in Bologna in 1384 and the second was copied in 1384 in Padua. Bessarion's *ex-libris* features on the first folio of both books. Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 122.

<sup>70</sup> Bianca, *Da Bisanzio a Roma*, 84.

<sup>71</sup> Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 147. Bianca cites the following publications regarding Bessarion's experience in Germany: E. Meuthen, 'Zum Itinerar der deutschen Legation Bessarions 1460-1', *Quellen Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 37 (1957), 328-33. See also Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, I, 294ff. For Nuremberg see G. Schuhmann, 'Kardinal Bessarion in Nuernberg', *Jahrbuch für Fränkische Landesforschung*, 35-35 (1975), 447-65. Bessarion's speech that he delivered to the monks is printed in Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 377-83.

<sup>72</sup> The volume by Duns Scotus has been decorated with the cardinal's coat of arms on folio 2r. Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 148.

undermined the cohesion of the library. Above all, the status and authority that Bessarion acquired through his integration into Italy had an impact on the ways in which he built up his library. The cardinal's prestige made him the recipient of many gifts and bequests during his time in Rome. Some of his books were gifts: the Minister General of the Augustinian Hermits, Gerardo da Rimini gave him a book by Marsilio da Inghen.<sup>73</sup> Bessarion also inherited books. He received three of them: Strabo's *Geographia* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.379), a collection of extracts from Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch and Aristotle (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.406), and Ptolemy's *Geographia* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.517) from the sons of his former tutor, George Gemistos Pletho. He also acquired three liturgical books in Latin from the heirs of Cardinal Isidoro Ruteno, and he gave them to the chapel of S. Eugenia in his titular church of SS Apostoli, Rome.<sup>74</sup> More books arrived following the deaths of Patriarch Isidore of Constantinople and of the bookseller Giovanni Aurispa. The latter was the secretary to Emperor John Palaeologus and was accused of running off with many sacred and secular Greek texts in 1416 and 1421-23. One of these was the renowned *Iliad* (the eponymous Homer A) which Bessarion seems to have acquired after Aurispa's death. There is extant correspondence between Bessarion and Nardo Palmiero on Aurispa's collection on 24 June 1459 revealing the machinations behind these acquisitions. The cardinal wrote:

We ask you to send the inventory of all the Greek books and to show them to us and we will see everything for ourselves.<sup>75</sup>

Such a statement seems to imply that Bessarion deployed a degree of discrimination and a collecting strategy: he was quite clear about only wanting certain books in Aurispa's collection. Indeed,

---

<sup>73</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.264 was copied in 1405 by the Eremitani brother 'Leonardus de Monte Ylcino' (f.75r). Bianca, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', 121.

<sup>74</sup> Mioni, 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', 61-83.

<sup>75</sup> 'Petimus etiam a te, ut mittas ad nos inventarium omnium librorum graecorum et significes nobis, an nos viderimus omnes.' Letter from Cardinal Bessarion to Nardo Palmiero, 24 June 1459, Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 493-94.

Bessarion had already singled out a few of Aurispa's books and he asked Palmiero to set aside two of them.<sup>76</sup>

The character of Cardinal Bessarion's collection was also shaped by his methods of acquisition. These were determined by his circumstances and involved both, what could be called, passive and proactive methods. Through his established networks of friends and associates, through active searching and passive inheritance, Bessarion deployed all methods of acquisition at his disposal and applied them to both his Latin and Greek collections. This common treatment should be interpreted as further evidence that he perceived his books to be two halves of a single collection.

### **Context: Private and Public Book Collections**

By comparing Bessarion's collection with the others put together by his contemporaries, it becomes clear that he envisaged a library that mirrored a concept rooted in the fifteenth-century West. While there was no shortage of libraries or book collectors in the first half of the fifteenth century in Constantinople, Bessarion treated his collection very differently from his peers. Virtually all libraries in the Byzantine Empire were housed in and maintained by an ecclesiastical institution. The most renowned example of this practice can be found in Theodore Metochites' donation of his entire book collection to the Chora Monastery. In contrast, Bessarion chose to donate his library to the Republic of Venice, a secular governmental institution.

It is necessary to set the cardinal's collection within two contexts which overlap but are essentially different. The first context situates Bessarion's collections among those established by contemporary

---

<sup>76</sup> 'Libros illos, quos tua manu notatos habemus, tu vero nostra, rogamus te, ut ad partem seponas et cum eis duos alios.' Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 493-94.

cardinals. The second comparison lies with the libraries established by secular humanist patrons in Italy during the fifteenth century.

The cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64), who was summoned from Germany by Pius II to reside in Rome from 1458 to 1464, was the owner of a collection of books that most closely resembled that of Bessarion. Both cardinals were motivated by their belief that an understanding of philosophy and the Church Fathers was the route to truth. To this end Nicholas of Cusa brought his library with him to Rome where he launched into a programme of exchanges, loans and copying with other collectors in the city.<sup>77</sup> It was this system of collecting and using his library that mirrored Bessarion's practices.

Concetta Bianca has written an extensive article on Cusanus' library in *Scrittura, biblioteche e stampa a Roma*.<sup>78</sup> Drawing on the material in her discussion, it becomes possible to see that Bessarion and the German cardinal collected similar content for their libraries. When Cusanus arrived in Rome the library consisted of books received during his papal legateship in Germany; philosophy books belonging to Pierre de Bruxelles; and gifts from Petrus Bangen and the bishop of Padua Faustino Dandolo. There were sixteen texts on astronomy acquired in Nuremberg in 1444; Greek books bought in Constantinople; and books linked to the Council of Basel.<sup>79</sup>

Cusanus' dealings with Bessarion reflect mutual interests in intellectual themes. Bessarion presented him with a copy of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and encouraged Cusanus' Neoplatonic interests.<sup>80</sup> Under the Greek cardinal's guidance Cusanus acquired the whole of Plato's dialogues and Proclus's

---

<sup>77</sup> Bianca, 'La bibliotheca romana di Niccolò Cusano', 676.

<sup>78</sup> Cusanus was motivated mainly by interest and curiosity, and he had an unusual system of classification – by argument, century and provenance. He had a particular interest in collecting antiquarian books. He owned a seventh-century Glossarium (British Library, Harley 5792); a tenth-century Livy (British Library, Harley 2672); and numerous twelfth-century manuscripts. Bianca, 'La bibliotheca romana di Niccolò Cusano', 688.

<sup>79</sup> Bianca, 'La bibliotheca romana di Niccolò Cusano', 681.

<sup>80</sup> Bianca, 'La bibliotheca romana di Niccolò Cusano', 702.

*Theologia Platonis*, which he had translated by Pietro Balbi who was also in the service of Bessarion. Like Bessarion, Nicholas of Cusa was the nucleus of a circle of scholarly familiars, although his group was not as big nor met as frequently as that of Bessarion. Many of those who followed Bessarion overlapped with Cusanus' circle like the editor Giovanni Andrea Bussi and the scholar Gaspare Biondo..<sup>81</sup> Cusanus was less successful than Bessarion at ensuring the future integrity of his book collection. Of the 270 manuscripts in the library of St Nikolaus-Hospital at Bernkastel-Kues (the institution founded by Cusanus for the care of the sick), fourteen are now in the Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, forty-eight are in the British Library, and others are scattered in Oxford, in the Vatican, Paris, Strasbourg, Bressanone and Volterra..<sup>82</sup>

Another significant similarity between the collections of the two cardinals lies in the location of their library foundations. Despite being buried in S. Pietro in Montorio in Rome, Nicholas of Cusa preferred to leave his library to his native country. Bessarion too was buried in Rome, but chose to leave his books to Venice. It is possible to interpret these efforts to leave a legacy outside of Rome as a reflection of the cardinals' efforts to establish a dominant position in the humanist culture of states that were not already overshadowed by the papacy.

In comparison with other contemporary cardinals, Bessarion's collection was rather unique. One of the largest Italian private libraries (second only to Bessarion's) during the fifteenth century belonged to Cardinal Domenico Capranica. On 14 August 1458 the cardinal founded the Collegio Capranica, leaving his book collection to the scholars resident at the institution..<sup>83</sup> According to the 1480 inventory

---

<sup>81</sup> Bianca, 'La bibliotheca romana di Niccolò Cusano', 691.

<sup>82</sup> Bianca, 'La bibliotheca romana di Niccolò Cusano', 677.

<sup>83</sup> '...quod libri S.R.D. qui sunt necessarii pro dicto collegio ordinentur deputentur et disponantur pro utilitate et commodo studentium in dicto collegio et alii vendantur.' Quoted in Antonovics, 'The Library of Cardinal Domenico Capranica', 141.

(Rome, BAV, Vat.lat.8184) there were 388 volumes containing 2000 works..<sup>84</sup> However, this library had a different character to Bessarion's collection. Capranica owned a collection that was typical of a Renaissance cardinal who had risen through the ranks after taking a degree in civil law. The books were chosen for their practical application to his day to day work. Volumes on canon law, legal tracts, and ecclesiastical treatises dominated the library..<sup>85</sup> There were large numbers of patristic texts, reflecting contemporary interests and debates such as those that arose at the Council of Florence. Unlike Bessarion, Capranica did not aspire to be a representative of Renaissance humanism – there were no books in Greek or Hebrew. Classical authors were few and far between, and there was little evidence of any interest in archaeology, history or philosophy.

Bessarion's contemporary, Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville also owned a collection of books and, as we have seen, the two men may have had some sort of relationship in their cultural ventures..<sup>86</sup> However, Bessarion's library surpassed that of the Frenchman in size and scope. The library of Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville contained 249 works in 269 volumes. As with Capranica, d'Estouteville was primarily focused on building a collection of texts on civil and canon law, creating an indispensable tool for his job in the Curia..<sup>87</sup> His manuscripts included patristic works, theological texts, some science and a smattering of history. However there were only five classical authors and no contemporary humanists among the books. Unlike Bessarion and Capranica, d'Estouteville divided his collection between various institutions that he patronised during his lifetime, sending 109 volumes to S. Luigi dei Franceschi in 1483; 61 volumes to the Vatican in the same year; and 181 to the Roman

---

<sup>84</sup> This figure comes from a copy of the earliest inventory drawn up in 1480 for the Biblioteca Capranicense. The copy can be found in the Vatican Library, BAV, Vat.Lat.8184, ff. 1-46. Saraco, *Il Cardinale Capranica*, 54.

<sup>85</sup> Antonovics' article on Capranica's library includes an analysis of the profile of the cardinal's collection organised according to the layout of the library. Antonovics, 'The Library of Cardinal Domenico Capranica', 143.

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 2 in which I discuss the hypothesis that Bessarion's chapel frescoes may have been connected to Cardinal d'Estouteville's mural programme in S. Maria Maggiore.

<sup>87</sup> Esposito Aliano, 'Testamento e inventari', 315.

monastery of S. Agostino in November 1484.<sup>88</sup> While Bessarion's collection reflects shared interests with other cardinals, this ecclesiastical character was merely one element in the make-up of his library.

The distinctiveness of Bessarion's library is explained by his aspirations to assume the roles of both a secular humanist patron and a Roman cardinal. This is demonstrated by a comparison with the libraries of fifteenth-century western lay collectors.

Despite differences in their circumstances, Federico da Montefeltro, the duke of Urbino (1422-82) and Bessarion shared a passion for books. Federico was able to establish a working library during his lifetime, and this was the collection of a secular prince with a side interest in scholarship. In the first instance he was a ruler and a mercenary, with a hobby in humanism. The duke was one of the best known collectors, and he and Bessarion were friends.<sup>89</sup> Through their relationship we can see one of the ways in which Greek studies were promoted in Renaissance Italy. Bessarion played a role in the education of the duke's sons Buonconte, Antonio and Guidobaldo. Federico's esteem for Bessarion and his diligence in making sure his sons could read Greek reveal a powerful Renaissance prince's attitudes towards Greek. Bessarion wrote to Buonconte da Montefeltro to offer encouragement in the Greek language. He told the boy that knowing both Latin and Greek would enhance his virtues, please his father and bring glory to the family.<sup>90</sup> The cardinal also planned to test the child, instructing him to memorise this letter in its Greek or Latin version (Niccolò Perotti was probably responsible for the Latin translation).<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Esposito Aliano, 'Testamento e inventari', 317.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion of Bessarion's relationship with Federico da Montefeltro see Carlo Ginzburg's *The Enigma of Piero*, an unorthodox interpretation of Piero della Francesca's *The Flagellation of Christ*.

<sup>90</sup> 'Aliis certe virtutibus tuis si utriusque etiam linguae cognitionem addideris et patris desiderio respondebis, et immortalē apud omnes gloriam consequere.'

Letter printed in Clough, 'Bessarion and Greek at the Court of Urbino', 160-171.

<sup>91</sup> 'Interea volumus, ut hanc nostram epistolam diligenter discas ac fideliter commemares, ut in nostro istuc adventu eam memoriter referre possis nec solum modo recitare verba, sed etiam sententias, sive graece malueris sive latine, nihil enim refert. Interrogabo quippe te quam exactissime de omnibus. Tu vide, quid sis responsurus.' Letter reprinted in Clough, 'Bessarion and Greek at the Court of Urbino', 160-71.

Federico took the small collection of books on practical subjects which he had inherited and turned it into a library of 900 volumes..<sup>92</sup> By comparing the two collections, it becomes apparent that like Bessarion, Federico conceived of his library as a working space rather than a mere collection of books. The cardinal's collection was to languish for half a decade after his death before it was housed in a library, but the Urbino library functioned in the duke's lifetime. Thought had been given to the layout – the inscription over the door read:

If you, o visitor, wish to know in which order the books are placed, read these short lines. To your right, the sacred texts, and the law volumes, and the Philosophers and the Doctors; nor is Geometry missing. On the left hand some Cosmographers, some Poets and all of the Historians.

The furniture was also carefully chosen including a table in the centre with benches, a brazier with tripods for heat, a bronze lectern and three ladders for accessing shelves.

Although both men apparently wanted their libraries to be practical and aesthetic spaces, a difference in the motivations behind their collecting can be detected. It is arguable that Federico's purpose in amassing this collection was to demonstrate that he was a humanist scholar-prince, thus enhancing his authority and his reputation. There were fewer religious texts in his collection than in that of Bessarion – he mainly collected works of literature and humanist philology. In all aspects, according to Marcella Peruzzi's history of the collection, it was a typical humanist selection: a body of classical authors, some vernacular works and contemporary texts..<sup>93</sup> Library tours were held regularly, and the librarian was expected to draw the visitor's attention to the cost, elegance of the script and sumptuousness of the

---

<sup>92</sup> This estimation is made by L. Michelini Tocci in 'La formazione della biblioteca di Federico da Montefeltro: codici contemporanei e libri a stampa', in *Federico di Montefeltro*, III, 9-18. Peruzzi, 'The Library of Glorious Memory', 33.

<sup>93</sup> Peruzzi, 'The Library of Glorious Memory', 32.



illuminations. The appearance of learning was as important as the content of the books. The evidence examined so far demonstrates that Bessarion had a more academic set of motivations. However similarities can be found in the commissioning of books. Both men relied on agents, such as Vespasiano da Bisticci for Federico and Michael Apostolis for Bessarion. They both set up scriptoria in Urbino and in Rome..<sup>94</sup>

Book collections were not the preserve of priests and princes, but were also amassed by the educated middle class. A contemporary collector of this kind was the Florentine Francesco Sassetti (1421-90) who was a bank manager for a Medicean establishment and later Cosimo de'Medici's personal assistant. His library consisted of only 120 books on mainly classical subjects with a few patristic texts..<sup>95</sup> He declared that his primary interests were poetry and history, and he disposed of the inferior manuscripts..<sup>96</sup> The collection is important for its quality rather than quantity. No doubt Bessarion would have coveted Sassetti's ninth-century copy of Martial, his *De Civitate Dei* by Augustine and maybe his fifteenth-century version of Vitruvius. Like the cardinal, Francesco employed his own scribes: Hubertus, Niccolò Fonzio and Bartolomeo Fonzio.

The context of the physical structure of the library was significant in regards to Bessarion's collection. Cosimo de'Medici commissioned a new library for the monastery of S. Marco in Florence in 1444 as part of the renovation of the whole institution..<sup>97</sup> This may have been the sort of building Bessarion envisaged for his library. The architect Michelozzo Michelozzi was hired for Cosimo's project, and his design ushered in a new tradition in library planning in the fifteenth century. Situated on the first floor, it was at the same level as the cells. At this stage the primary message conveyed was that the scholars

---

<sup>94</sup> Peruzzi, 'The Library of Glorious Memory', 36. On the activity in the Urbino scriptorium see C. Martelli, 'Il Petrarca da Bartolomeo della Gatta per Federico da Montefeltro e lo *scriptorium* del duca attorno al 1480', *Prospettiva*, 119-120 (2005), 2-22.

<sup>95</sup> Albinia de la Mare has written a chapter on Francesco Sassetti's library, 'The Library of Francesco Sassetti', esp. 164.

<sup>96</sup> De la Mare, 'The Library of Francesco Sassetti', 166.

<sup>97</sup> Ulman and Stadter, *The Public Library of the Renaissance*, 4-5.

must enter the monastery's territory to access the books – Bessarion's library in contrast would be separate from any religious structure. The model plan for Cosimo's library provided for a long hall with three naves and twelve piers separated by a row of Ionic columns..<sup>98</sup> The space is characterised by its linear structure, simple elegance and Brunelleschian proportions. On the wall to the right of the entrance are three full-length windows and nine smaller ones looking out onto cloister. There are a total of 64 benches in each of the naves.

In the end Bessarion's library would be housed in a far different type of structure. By the early decades of the 1500s the books were still in boxes and were being moved from one location to another in the doge's palace and the basilica of San Marco. The procurator Vettor Grimani and the new librarian Cardinal Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) made efforts to persuade the Senate to invest in a more permanent solution by hiring the architect Jacopo Sansovino (1486-1570) to design a suitable library in the Piazza. In 1537 Aretino described the basic plan of a two-storey elevation with Doric columns below and Ionic above..<sup>99</sup> By 1564 the books could be moved into the new reading room, nearly a century after Bessarion's donation. However it can be speculated that it was a setting which would have met with his approval. Sansovino had modelled the library on descriptions of ancient libraries in Pausanias' *Guide to Greece*. Writing about Hadrian's library in the temple at Athens, Pausanias recorded,

the hundred columns of Phrygian marble, with walls built just like the columns, and pavilions with gilded roof work and alabaster, decorated with statues and paintings. Books are kept in them..<sup>100</sup>

According to Deborah Howard in her book on Jacopo Sansovino's architecture, the architect likewise erected a colonnaded facade, used marble, gilding, painting and sculpture to create a classical

---

<sup>98</sup> Cecchini, 'Evoluzione architettonico-strutturale della Biblioteca pubblica', 27.

<sup>99</sup> Aretino's letter of 20 November 1537 was written to Sansovino and first published in Venice in 1538. It is translated into English in Appendix 1 of Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 158.

<sup>100</sup> Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, trans. P. Levi, I, *Central Greece*, London 1971, 53; cited in Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 27, n. 99.

environment for a classical collection..<sup>101</sup> Special attention was paid to the vestibule of the reading room for the public school where the pupils learned Greek and Latin philosophy, law, history and literature - a curriculum based on the character of the cardinal's collection. The library even faced east on the advice of the ancient writer Vitruvius to prevent sun damage to the books.

The function and the definition of a library were pertinent issues to Bessarion and other fifteenth-century collectors. This was especially apparent in the evolution of the Vatican Library. Prior to Sixtus IV (1414-84) there was no library: the pope had a personal collection which he moved around as part of his treasury and which was usually dispersed at his death. Nicholas V was the first pope to address this problem. He was an avid collector of manuscripts, and Sixtus IV would later commission a fresco of his predecessor's coat of arms on the vaulting in one of the library rooms in recognition of his contribution. Nicholas' collection of Greek texts was the only one to surpass Bessarion's. However, under Nicholas V it remained a collection rather than a library. His intentions to provide a physical space were never realised: there was no financial backing to guarantee its permanence, and, crucially, he made no provision for the public..<sup>102</sup> The collection occupied a single room and was lit by a single window, while the books were arranged in chests organised by Nicholas himself..<sup>103</sup>

In comparison to the emerging papal library Bessarion was forward-thinking. His collection was personal and was shaped by his own agenda. However, during his lifetime he conceived of it as a tool for the public community of scholars, and handed it over to the Venetians. As an individual he did not have the means to provide an edifice and employ a librarian but he gave it to a wealthy and powerful

---

<sup>101</sup> Howard's section on the Biblioteca Marciana traces its evolution from its beginnings in 1537 to its eventual completion in 1591 after Sansovino's death. Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 17-28.

<sup>102</sup> Bignami-Odier describes Nicholas' good intentions which failed to materialize. However, his plans were in keeping with those posthumously realised by Bessarion. Bignami-Odier, *Bibliothèque Vaticane*, 10.

<sup>103</sup> Bignami-Odier makes reference to A. Albareda, 'Il bibliotecario di Callisto III', *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, Vatican City 1946, IV, 178-200: 192; and Paul Fabre, 'La Vaticane de Sixte IV', *Mélanges archéologiques historiques*, 15 (1895), 455. Bignami-Odier, *Bibliothèque Vaticane*, 10.

government. Eventually it would form the basis of the Biblioteca Marciana collection, housed finally in the sixteenth century and equipped with a librarian.

Despite not having the resources or the tools to rival the papal collection, Bessarion's library was doubtless both an inspiration to the popes as well as being conceived to imitate the papal collecting efforts. Calixtus III (1378-1458), Pius II and Paul II did not pursue the plans of their predecessor Pope Nicholas, although they all added to a growing papal collection. In his short pontificate Calixtus had an exhaustive inventory drawn up. Legend has it that this was a preliminary step to selling off the collection but these rumours seem to be unfounded. By 1456 it was still intact although he was actively lending manuscripts to humanist cardinals – eleven Greek volumes were loaned to Cardinal Bessarion by the pope.<sup>104</sup> Though a great humanist and writer, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (later Pius II), did not think of book collecting as a project for providing the public with access to texts. What he amassed during his lifetime was treated as a personal collection and became the property of the Piccolomini family on his death.<sup>105</sup> His nephew, Pope Pius III, moved the books to Siena in 1503..<sup>106</sup>

The official foundation of the Vatican Library is marked by the bull issued by Sixtus IV on 15 June 1475 (three years after Bessarion's death) entitled *Ad decorem militantis Ecclesiae*.<sup>107</sup> This provided a physical site ('loca eis accommodata preparat'); a designated staff ('ipsorum librorum et Bibliothecae gubernatorem et custodem deputavimus'); and financial security. Bartolomeo Platina was the appointed librarian and his tireless work to expand the collection resulted in nearly 1,000 books being

---

<sup>104</sup> Bignami-Odier, *Bibliothèque Vaticane*, 12.

<sup>105</sup> Bignami-Odier cites A. Piccolomini, 'De codicibus Pii II e Pii III deque bibliotheca Ecclesiae cathedralis Senensis', *Bulletino Senese*, 6 (1899), 483-96. Bignami-Odier, *Bibliothèque Vaticane*, 12.

<sup>106</sup> Only part of the collection was moved because Pius III died before the transfer could be completed. See Bignami-Odier, *Bibliothèque Vaticane*, 12-13.

<sup>107</sup> Reprinted in Ruyschaert, 'Sixtus IV', 523-24. All the quotations in this section are taken directly from the reprint in Ruyschaert of Sixtus IV's bull (Arm XXXI, 62, ff. 115v-116).

added to the library during his tenure.<sup>108</sup> The pope recognised that the volumes in the papal collection had been carelessly treated and were in a state of disrepair. They had also been scattered among many collections, and part of the librarian's duty, according to the bull, was to gather them in one place ('sparsa librorum volumina ad ipsorum profectum in unum reducit'). Sixtus wanted this library to function as a public institution instead of a private papal collection. He stated that it should serve the cause of humanist learning, opening the doors to intellectual men (eruditorum quoque ac litterarum studiis insistentium virorum commodum). Even more radically, he stipulated in the bull that conditions for study were to be conducive ('ut sectatores liberalium artium eo facilius ad tam preclsum humane conditionis fastigium acquirendum'). This focus on public access as well as the scope of the collection resonates in Bessarion's library and could suggest that one of the cardinal's legacies was to inspire the Vatican Library.

## Conclusion

The aspects of Cardinal Bessarion's collection that have been analysed in this chapter lead to the conclusion that its formation reflects the work and inspiration of a patron of Italian humanist culture. Certainly he was trying to preserve Greek culture in his concerted efforts to gather together important classical and religious texts, but it should be asked for whom this collection was built. When his collection is considered alongside his equally impressive Latin library the western nature of the exercise becomes apparent. It is possible that his choice of Venice as the repository for his books can be attributed to the cardinal's wish to dominate the humanist scene of an important Italian state in the way that the papal collection did in Rome and the Medici library did in Florence. The framework for assessing Bessarion's library should be chronological and contextual: although his interest in Byzantium looms large in this structure, it should be understood that he was filtering it through the lens

---

<sup>108</sup> Bignami-Odier cites A. Albareda, 'Il bibliotecario di Callisto III', *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, Vatican City 1946, IV, 178-200: 197-98. Bignami-Odier, *Bibliothèque Vaticane*, 24. Documentary sources can be found in E. Muntz and P. Fabre, *La Bibliothèque du Vatica au XV siècle, d'après des documents inédits. Contribution pour servir à l'histoire de l'humanisme*, Paris 1887 (reprinted Amsterdam 1970), 316-17; 339-44; and Robert Devereese, *Le fonds grec de la Bibliothèque Vaticane des origines à Paul V*, Vatican City 1965, 37-42.

of a man assimilating and succeeding within a western environment. An examination of the contents of the collections and his methods of acquisition support this theory by demonstrating that similar principles lay behind the formation of the Greek and Latin collections. History, philosophy and rhetoric are the predominant subjects of the volumes along with theological works. Books were collected through agents, commissions, gifts and bequests. In comparison with other libraries of fifteenth-century collectors, Bessarion's collection resembles a blend of a secular humanist patron and a working cardinal. Such a large number of Greek texts were unheard of in the collections of contemporary cardinals such as Capranica and Guillaume d'Estouteville. However Bessarion possessed rather more religious and theological works than men such as Federico da Montefeltro and Niccolò Niccoli.

This chapter has looked at Bessarion's books as a collection and as a stage in the history of the library. The importance of the cardinal's role in the development of these institutions is evident in the eventual foundation of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice where Bessarion's collection formed the kernel of the library's holdings. Having considered all 900 books as a whole, I would now like to look at the decoration of individual volumes owned and commissioned by the cardinal.

## Chapter 5: Manuscript Illumination

In the manner of other fifteenth-century patrons, such as the cardinals Nicholas of Cusa, Guillaume d'Estouteville and Domenico Capranica, Cardinal Bessarion amassed a collection of illuminated manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will examine the decorated volumes in both his Latin and Greek collections. While he collected luxury books for his own library, he also commissioned a massive project for a series of choir books that he intended to donate to a Franciscan monastery in Constantinople. To date scholars have been less focused on Bessarion as a patron of the illuminated manuscript than on the issue of artist attribution regarding the illuminated initials in the choir book series.<sup>2</sup> Studies of the cardinal's books tend to consider the textual content rather than his appreciation for decoration. However, Bessarion commissioned many decorated works that clearly indicate an interest in collecting luxury manuscripts. From commissioning illuminated texts, collecting decorated books and deploying visual codes (in the form of coats of arms and portraits) to express his patronage, the cardinal followed the pattern typical of fifteenth-century western collectors.

The main sources for this chapter are the manuscripts themselves in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice where Bessarion's library collection exists intact and in the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena, the home of the extant choir books. Most of these manuscripts have never been systematically examined first hand for their patterns of illumination, and those that have been studied, in particular the choir books, have inspired studies that focus on issues of artist attribution. By analysing the illustrations and situating them in their artistic and cultural contexts, an extra dimension is revealed in the debate about Bessarion and book illustration. This contributes both to our understanding of the cardinal's patterns of patronage and to the contention that he looked to the West to a great extent for his cultural identity.

---

<sup>1</sup> For Nicholas of Cusa's library see Concetta Bianca's article, 'La biblioteca romana di Niccolò Cusano'. Anthony Antonovics has written about Capranica's library in 'The Library of Cardinal Domenico Capranica'; and Guillaume d'Estouteville's collection is discussed by Anna Esposito Aliano in 'Testamento e inventari per la ricostruzione della biblioteca del Cardinale Guglielmo d'Estouteville'.

<sup>2</sup> Only Fabrizio Lollini and Giordana Mariani Canova have written extensively on Bessarion's illuminated manuscripts. While Lotte Labowsky and Elpidio Mioni have studied the cardinal's library collection, their focus has been on the textual content rather than the decoration.

Any study of the artwork in Bessarion's manuscripts raises the issue of the contrast between the decorative schemes deployed for the Greek and Latin books. For the most part the two are distinctly different in appearance, and the cardinal evidently used native Greek illuminators for the Byzantine books and local Italians for the Latin books. However, the proportion of decorated books that are in Latin is overwhelmingly greater (as well as being more elaborate) than for the Greek. Additionally, the cardinal's most significant commission of illuminated books: the choir books, was executed, not for a Greek institution as might be expected but by Italian artists for a monastery of a western Order based in Constantinople. This monastery was established by Pope Eugenius IV in 1449,<sup>3</sup> and the papal link must have been an incentive for Bessarion to contribute to the project. It would have doubtless been beneficial to the cardinal's reputation to be associated with the pope's scheme. Arguably, owning luxury manuscripts and making donations of these objects was a means by which Bessarion might raise his cultural profile in his Roman environment. The evidence suggests that Bessarion was actively commissioning books with decorative schemes which would impress western readers, and that he was equally sensitive to his environment in the West as to his homeland in Byzantium.

### The Choir Book Commission

Between 1451 and 1460 Cardinal Bessarion undertook an ambitious cultural project when he commissioned around eighteen large format, heavily illustrated choir books for the Franciscan Monastery of St Anthony of 'Chypriss' or Padua in Constantinople (Figure 44).<sup>4</sup> The Franciscans were established in Constantinople by 1220, and were influential at the Latin court in the city.<sup>5</sup> They were known for their cultural pursuits, owning a library in Constantinople with Greek books,

---

<sup>3</sup> Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, 589-90. This commission is discussed in detail below. There is no comment by historians about whether the monastery in Constantinople styled itself as of Conventual or Observant persuasion. However, Moorman's study of the Franciscans in the fifteenth century makes it clear that given Eugenius' interest in the reform of monastic orders and his actions as pope, it is clear that his sympathies lay with the Observants. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 448-52. A monastery championed by this pope probably towed such a line.

<sup>4</sup> Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, Bessarione 1-8.

<sup>5</sup> See Matteucci, *La missione francescana di Constantinopoli*, and Wolff, 'The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', 213.



indicating that the Franciscans were proficient in the Greek language..<sup>6</sup> Although the Order was exiled from the Byzantine capital in 1261, they returned before 1296 and retained a monastery in the city until 1307 when they were forced once again to leave..<sup>7</sup> In 1449 Pope Eugenius IV sent a special commission to found another Franciscan institution to be located within the Constantinopolitan walls..<sup>8</sup> The monastery was known as St Anthony of 'Chypriss' and was dedicated to St Anthony of Padua or to St Anthony the Hermit. Construction was complete by 1451..<sup>9</sup> The choir books never made it to Constantinople as they were still unfinished when the city fell to the Turks two years later.

It is not clear exactly how many books were commissioned. Writing in the sixteenth century, the biographer of Domenico Malatesta, Nicolò Masini estimated that:

Sixteen or eighteen volumes of very beautiful books for the use of the Choir are found in the sacristy of this church [S. Annunziata, Cesena], written on vellum with beautiful letters and miniatures. [These books] in the year 1451 were destined for the Monastery of St Anthony of Padua in the city of Constantinople, inhabited by the aforementioned Observant Franciscans, from the Cardinal Bessarion who at that time was the Apostolic Legate in Bologna. But when the city fell under the Turkish dominion, [the books] were given to this monastery [in Cesena] by Malatesta..<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Wolff draws attention to the readiness of the Franciscans to quote the Greek Fathers directly in Greek. Wolff, 'The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', 230.

<sup>7</sup> The Franciscans also had several establishments in Greece. The monasteries on Euboea, in Crete, Thebes and Corinth were founded before 1261, while those at Athens and Clarentia were founded later. Wolff, 'The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', 231, n. 68.

<sup>8</sup> Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, 589-90. Janin references M. Belin, *Histoire de l'église latine de Constantinople*, Paris 1872, 105, 108.

<sup>9</sup> Gualberto Matteucci discusses this monastery in *La missione francescana di Constantinopoli*, I, 213-23. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, 589-90.

<sup>10</sup> Masini, *Vita di Domenico Malatesta*, 272: 'Si trovano nella Sagrestia di questa Chiesa sedici, o 18 Volumi di bellissimi Libri destinati ad uso del Coro, scritti in Carta pergamena con belli Caratteri, e vaghe Miniature; questi tali Libri nell'anno 1451 erano stati destinati dal Cardinale Bessarione in quel tempo Legato Apostolico di Bologna al Convento di S. Antonio di Padova della Città di Costantinopoli abitato da medesimi PP. Di S. Francesco Osservanti; ma per essere quella città caduta sotto il dominio Turchesco, dal Malatesta furono concessi a questo Convento.' Translation Laura Bolick.

A similar account is given in the fifteenth-century contemporary chronicle, *Caos*, but in this instance the author, Giuliano Fantaguzzi claimed that there were a total of twenty volumes.<sup>11</sup> After the confiscation of monastic property in Italy in the Napoleonic and post-unification eras, the books were dispersed, and the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena holds only eight of the total today. Loose sheets that have been identified as originating from the Bessarion choir books are scattered in worldwide collections.<sup>12</sup> In 1812 an inventory of the Biblioteca Malatestiana was prepared which listed a total of fifteen books belonging to Bessarion's commission. The set comprised a complete gradual for Mass and a complete antiphonary for the Hours, covering the moveable feasts (the temporal) and the saints' feasts (the sanctoral).<sup>13</sup> The liturgies from the first Sunday in Advent to Passion Sunday as well as the Proper of saints of the Assumption and of the martyred saints are included in the extant eight books or *corali*. The books measure between 540mm and 630mm in height – the largest is *corale* 7 which measures 730mm. They are covered with wooden boards clad in embossed leather with a metal margin and four metal studs in each corner (Figure 45). All eight volumes are decorated with historiated and illuminated initials (Figures 46–48). The musical notations are inscribed in black on red lines with the introductory notes to each passage in gold. Two of the *corali* (the antiphonaries, 3 and 7) contain Bessarion's coat of arms in the lower margin of one of the initial pages.

<sup>11</sup> Fantaguzzi, *Caos*, 2: 'Domenicho Malatesta, Signore de Cesena, fiolo de Pandolfo Malatesta, nato a Bressa con i altri 2 fratelli, et nelle sientie et fatti d'arme preclarissimo, fratello del ditto Sigismondo, in questi tempi fondò el monasterio dedicato a la Anuntiata matre de Dio de l'ordine de frati minuri osservanti de fora de Cesena, luoco molto ameno e delettevole con molti bellissimi cipressi et vi sonno circa 20 volumi de libri grandissimi e dignissimi lasatolli dal Cardenale Greco ad officiare dicta ecclesia fatti per mandarli a Costantinopoli preso dal Turcho.'

<sup>12</sup> Giordana Canova has identified, based on stylistic similarities with the illuminations in the extant books, the following sheets as loose leafs from Bessarion's choir book collection. Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, n. 2096 showing Bessarion's coat of arms; n. 2207, with an illuminated initial depicting the Pentecost; n. 2097, with an illuminated initial depicting the Ascension; Wildenstein Collection, NY, with an illuminated initial depicting the Ascension; the Lehman Collection, NY, A. 26, with an illuminated initial depicting St Anthony; the Lehman Collection, NY, A. 15, with an illuminated initial depicting St Clare; the Lehman Collection, NY, A. 37, with an illuminated initial depicting St Francis with the stigmata; Honolulu Academy of Arts, 13159, with an illuminated initial depicting St John the Baptist; Honolulu Academy of Arts, 13160, with an illuminated initial depicting Saints Peter and Paul; Cleveland Museum of Art, Wade Fund 28.652, with an illuminated initial depicting the Assumption of the Virgin; Cleveland Museum of Art, J. D. Ireland Collection, with an illuminated initial depicting the Nativity; National Gallery of Washington, Rosenwald Collection, B. 13.525, with an illuminated initial depicting St Francis with the stigmata; Kupertischkabinett di Berlin, cod. 4493, with an illuminated initial depicting the Birth of the Virgin; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, cod. II. 50.4, with an illuminated initial depicting the Presentation in the Temple; cod. II. 50.2, with an illuminated initial depicting a gathering of saints; cod. II 50.1, with an illuminated initial depicting the Assumption; cod. II 50.3, with an illuminated initial depicting the Assumption. Canova, 'Una illustre serie liturgica ricostruita', 9-20.

<sup>13</sup> Lollini, 'Volumi Liturgici miniati nel territorio Cesenate', 232.

This commission is thought to have been executed over a period of ten years and over the decade Bessarion changed the beneficiary from the monastery in Constantinople to the Malatesta family after the Turks took the Byzantine city. This has implications for any interpretation of Bessarion's agenda in commissioning the project. The art historian Fabrizio Lollini has proposed a timeline based on a stylistic analysis for the execution of the books in his article 'Bologna, Ferrara, Cesena'.<sup>14</sup> According to Lollini the series was begun in 1451-52 for the Constantinopolitan monastery. Books 1, 3 and 5, which are all graduals, would have been completed during this year by a Lombard master working in Bologna. In 1453 the Fall of Constantinople forced the cardinal to change his mind about the destination of his gift, although he probably had not chosen a new recipient at this point. Work continued with the writing and illuminating of *corali* 2 (a gradual) and 7 (an antiphonary). When Bessarion left Bologna in 1455 he abandoned the commission and there was an interruption to the work. By 1458, after the cardinal's appointment as Protector of the Friars Minor, his interest in the Franciscan project was rekindled. The following year the series was transferred to Ferrara and the work handed to local craftsmen who finished the antiphonaries, *corali* 4 and 6. By 1460-61 a newly constructed building for the Observant Order of the Franciscans in Cesena was completed and around 1462 Bessarion made a gift of the now finished choir books to the local nobleman in Cesena, Malatesta Novello through his wife Violante for the Franciscan monastery attached to S. Maria Annunziata, an institution that was the beneficiary of the couple.

The traditional scholarship on the choir books is mainly focused on efforts to determine the identities of individual artists at work on the historiated initials. The stylistic attribution is dependent in part on knowing when a particular book was commissioned, but Lollini's timeline (which seems plausible) generates other questions about the project. Why was Bessarion commissioning a set of Latin choir books for a Franciscan establishment in Constantinople? What does this say about his relationship with Greece? How did they come to be donated to Malatesta

---

<sup>14</sup> Lollini, 'Bologna, Ferrara, Cesena', 26.

Novello and what is the implication of this for Bessarion's attitude towards patronage? Finally, this was a massive, expensive and ostentatious project which employed some of the leading miniaturists in Bologna, Ferrara and the Romagna. What message was the cardinal projecting by financing and organising this commission?

Fantaguzzi's chronicle is our source for the identity of the initial beneficiary, the monastery in Constantinople.<sup>15</sup> Bessarion's commission demonstrates involvement from the beginning of his Roman career with a papal project to promote a Catholic Order in the Byzantine Empire. Bessarion was evidently associated with the agenda to bring about the Roman Catholic supremacy and union of the Churches by this stage. Additionally, the cardinal was not deterred by the image he might project among Greeks as a 'former' national now prepared to command a major Latin cultural project in Constantinople. These choir books with their elaborate and expensive decoration would have been a potent statement of the cardinal's new position as a promoter of Latin culture. They also reveal that Bessarion was involved in an effort to export western artistic culture to Constantinople, a reversal of the traditional assessment which positions the cardinal's cultural patronage as a conduit to bring the East to the West.

Between 1458 and 1468 Bessarion donated his choral books to the Observant Franciscan monastery - known as S. Maria Annunziata of Cesena, which had been established by Violante Malatesta, the wife of the local duke of Cesena.<sup>16</sup> Such a sumptuous gift indicates that Bessarion had some significant links with her family. Her husband, Malatesta Novello (1418-65) was the illegitimate son of Pandolfo Malatesta and was legitimized by Pope Martin V so that he could inherit Pandolfo's dukedom.<sup>17</sup> In 1434 he was contracted to marry Violante, the daughter of Guidantonio da Montefeltro and Caterina Colonna, to bring about peace between the warring Montefeltro and Malatesta families.<sup>18</sup> In 1442 a pact was forged with Federico da Montefeltro and

---

<sup>15</sup> Fantaguzzi, *Caos*.

<sup>16</sup> Pasini, *Malatesta Novello Magnifico Signore*, 227.

<sup>17</sup> *Biografico Nazionale degli Italiani*, 68: 23-28.

<sup>18</sup> *Biografico Nazionale degli Italiani*, 68: 23-28.

the wedding took place in June of that year at Urbino..<sup>19</sup> One of the wedding gifts offered to Violante was a pleasure garden in which she, according to an anonymous chronicler, dated by the handwriting to the eighteenth century, founded the church of S. Annunziata and the attached Franciscan monastery. The text, included in 'Notizie intorno ai libri Corali con miniature del 1461' reads,

...in the year 1461 Violante, wife of Malatesta Novello, daughter of Guido Antonio dei Feltreschi, duke of Urbino, with the permission of her husband, laid the foundations outside the Porta Santa Maria, formerly the Porta Figarola, in her own garden and House of Delights, on 8 May, of the Church dedicated to Santissima Annunziata with a monastery of the Fathers of the Reform of St Francis and gave to the said church 12 volumes of choral books with large characters, illuminated in gold, singularly beautiful; owned by Cardinal Bessarion, who had had them made for the monastery of St Anthony of Padua in the city of Constantinople..<sup>20</sup>

Clearly by the eighteenth century there was already some confusion over the number of volumes in Bessarion's commission as the chronicler speaks of twelve books yet the 1812 inventory lists fifteen volumes.

There are several reasons why Cardinal Bessarion might have been motivated to donate his homeless set of choir books to Malatesta. None of them in isolation seem strong enough to justify the generosity of the gift, but taken together a stronger case can be made. Fabrizio Lollini points out that Violante was linked to both the Montefeltro court in Urbino, where she had lived until 1446, and with the Colonna household in Rome where she stayed with her uncle Prospero Colonna

---

<sup>19</sup> Biografico Nazionale degli Italiani, 68: 23-28.

<sup>20</sup> Archive of Convent of Osservanza (n. 19, bk VII): '...dell'anno 1461, Violante, moglie di Malatesta Novello, figlia di Guido Antonio dei Feltreschi Duca d'Urbino, col permesso del marito, eresse da fondamenti fuori dalla Porta Santa Maria, anticamente detta Porta Figarola, nel suo proprio giardino e Casa di Delizia, alli 8 di maggio, la Chiesa dedicata alla S.ma Annunziata col Convento, di Padri della Riforma di S. Francesco e dono à detta Chiesa 12 pezzi di Libri di Coro, con carattere grande, miniati d'oro, di singolare bellezza; Avuti dal Cardinale Bisarione, che Egli aveva fatti fare e destinati al convento di S. Antonio da Padova nella città di Costantinopoli.' Quoted in Lollini, Lollini, 'Bologna, Ferrara, Cesena', 23. Translation Laura Bolick.

during a period of unrest in Urbino..<sup>21</sup> These links might have provided Violante with the opportunity to establish contact with Bessarion, whose church SS Apostoli was attached to the former Colonna residence in Rome. The cardinal was a close friend of Federico da Montefeltro, and the donation of the choir books could be seen as an exercise in cementing Bessarion's status as a man with highly placed friends. In addition Violante and Bessarion's links with the Colonna would have promoted the cardinal's association with a powerful family in Rome. With Malatesta Novello, there were also possible links. Malatesta was an active courtier-scholar-warlord in the same vein as Federico da Montefeltro. The Cesena lord owned a book collection typical of an Italian scholar including titles by St Augustine, St Gregory the Great and St Ambrose along with a copy of the Bessarion's own translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*..<sup>22</sup>

Bessarion and Malatesta shared a concept of a public library, and Lollini suggests that Bessarion's aspiration for his own collection was a library along the lines of the Biblioteca Malatestiana rather than the Laurenziana in Florence..<sup>23</sup> A letter dated 26 May 1450 survives which described the Franciscan monastery's proposal to construct a library and Malatesta's intention to donate books worth 500 florins. Pope Nicholas issued a bull granting permission for the project..<sup>24</sup> It was Malatesta, in the end, who finally took the initiative and financed the entirety of the construction. This was one of the first libraries founded by a secular lord and sustained by a religious community. In the beginning scholarships were limited to young friars studying theology, but these were soon extended to the inhabitants of Cesena and to students of civil and canon law, medicine, philosophy and science..<sup>25</sup> Access to the Laurenziana was regulated through the monastery of S. Marco. In contrast, Malatesta Novello was committed to the provision of a library that was open to secular readers. Ultimately this was also a factor in Bessarion's bequest to the Venetian Republic. In addition, Malatesta Novello and his wife were part of the scholarly community in Italy in the fifteenth century – the lord was the dedicatee in several works by humanists such as Francesco

---

<sup>21</sup> Lollini, 'Bologna, Ferrara, Cesena', 23.

<sup>22</sup> Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, B. Ms.S.IX.2.

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 4 of the present dissertation.

<sup>24</sup> Bull of Nicholas V, Cesena Archivio di Stato, OIR, n.128/58.

<sup>25</sup> Pasini, *Malatesta Novello Magnifico Signore*, 211.

Filelfo, Poggio Bracciolini and Flavio Biondo.<sup>26</sup> The donation to the Malatesta family was a means of reinforcing Bessarion's role as a western patron through his collaboration with a high profile humanist.

More significantly, the dates of the donation may offer a clue to Bessarion's agenda. As was mentioned, in 1458 the cardinal was appointed Protector of the Friars Minor, and he made several donations of books to Franciscan institutions like those to SS Apostoli.<sup>27</sup> The Franciscans made an appearance in Cesena in 1459.<sup>28</sup> Violante and Bessarion shared a special devotion to San Bernardino (the cardinal had played a role in the saint's canonization in 1450),<sup>29</sup> and his gift may have been a gesture of support to a fledgling community and an acknowledgement of mutual devotion.<sup>30</sup> Bernardino was a renowned Franciscan preacher who championed the cause of the Observants who sought to reform the Order of the Friars Minor, which he joined in 1403. This act of patronage offered the cardinal the opportunity to ingratiate himself with Montefeltro, Colonna and the not insignificant Malatesta Novello, but also to reinforce his role as Protector of the Friars Minor.

The commissioning of volumes of this size and opulence was a major undertaking, and there is evidence that this was a very personal project for the cardinal. Bessarion's choir books are described in Fantaguzzi's *Caos* as 'libri grandissimi e dignissimi'.<sup>31</sup> and in Giuseppe Maria Muccioli's catalogue of 1784, which covers the collection of the Malatestiana Library, as 'egregiis Voluminibus'.<sup>32</sup> Two of the books that remain in the Biblioteca Malatestiana contain what Roberto

---

<sup>26</sup> *Biografico Nazionale degli Italiani*, 68: 23-28.

<sup>27</sup> See chapters 1 and 2 of the present dissertation.

<sup>28</sup> Fantaguzzi, *Caos*, f. 4v records that the influential Observant Franciscan Giacomo della Marca was in Cesena at this time and had a close relationship with Violante. Dolcini, 'La Storia Religiosa', 109-10.

<sup>29</sup> Violante's support for San Bernardino is not confirmed by contemporary sources but is suggested in Franceschini, 'Violante Montefeltro Malatesti', 169, n. 66.

<sup>30</sup> Lollini, 'Bologna, Ferrara, Cesena', 23.

<sup>31</sup> Fantaguzzi, *Caos*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Muccioli, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Malatestianae Caesenatis Bibliothecae Fratrum Minorum Conventualium fidei custodiaeque concreditae historica praefatione, variisque adnotationibus illustratus*.

Weiss has identified as portraits of Bessarion..<sup>33</sup> By inserting traces of the cardinal's physical being into certain books a message was conveyed to the recipients of the commission that Bessarion was a significant patron of work in the western style. Indeed, it is conceivable that he harboured a personal preference for the aesthetic vocabulary of the West. On folio 1 of the gradual, *corale* 2, the page begins with an historiated initial 'A', set in a gold leaf square measuring 250 x 210mm (Figure 49). In the lower left hand corner a kneeling monk lifts his naked soul up to the figure of God in the upper right-hand corner, illustrating the start of the psalm 25, 'Ad te levavi animam meam'. Weiss identifies the artist as a northern Italian miniaturist working under the influence of Belbello da Pavia..<sup>34</sup> The monk has a tonsured head and a beard and wears a grey gown; there is a red cardinal's hat at his feet. With the facial hair, the hat and the grey robes, typical of the Basilian Order, this seems to be a portrait of Cardinal Bessarion. Offering his soul to heaven was possibly a bid by the cardinal to guarantee that his memory would be evoked for those using the books. In addition, the text was used as the introit for the first Sunday in Advent, the start of the penitential season and thus the juxtaposition of the cardinal's portrait with these words was a suitable vehicle to remind readers to pray for the salvation of his soul.

One of the books commissioned for Constantinople also contains a portrait of the cardinal so it is clear that Bessarion was making a declaration of his position in the Latin Church in a book destined for an institution based in Byzantium. In this portrait, which appears in the gradual *corale* 5, folio 1, the artist has illuminated an historiated initial 'V' for the first line of the psalm 'Vir dica me deus et discente' (Figure 50). In the upper centre of the image the figure of Christ, floating on clouds and showing his wounds like a Man of Sorrows, is seated in a gold mandorla. A bearded monk wearing grey robes and kneeling at a prie-dieu features in the bottom right-hand corner. He has a scroll clasped between his hands and he gestures towards the figure of Christ. Next to him are the red cardinal's hat and a model of a church. Once again this must be a portrait of Bessarion: like the one

<sup>33</sup> Weiss, 'Two Unnoticed "Portraits" of Cardinal Bessarion'.

<sup>34</sup> Weiss, 'Two Unnoticed "Portraits" of Cardinal Bessarion', 4. Belbello da Pavia worked in Mantua, Milan and ultimately in Venice. He is described as having a gothic style with elements of realism and a skilful use of light and shade. His figures have volume and substance. For more literature on Belbello da Pavia, see Levi d'Ancona, *The Wildenstein Collection of Illuminations*, 35-59; Meiss and Kirsch, *The Visconti Hours*; Canova, *Miniature dell'Italia settentrionale*, 44-48; Cadei, *Belbello da Pavia*; Cadei, *Studi di miniatura lombarda*.



in *corale* 2 the physiognomy is distinctive with the tonsured head and pronounced nose. Similarly, the grey robes and beard function as motifs by which to identify him. These portraits perform as statements of the cardinal's ownership and as the visualisation of his relationship with God. His attributes of status are prominently displayed (the model church and the cardinal's hat), serving to establish his identity and describing his role in the Latin Church's ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Bessarion also commissioned elaborate coats of arms in several of the choir books which serve to make a statement about his identity and his ownership of the commission.<sup>35</sup> Four out of the eight remaining volumes in Cesena are decorated with the cardinal's device on folio 1 (Figure 51).<sup>36</sup>

### **Bessarion and the Italian Tradition in Manuscript Illumination**

Bessarion evidently had a taste for the latest Italian styles in book illumination, and the characteristics of his commissions situate him within the cultural mainstream of the West. Based on the nature of the decoration, it will become clear that he made use of Italian scribes and illuminators. This seems to further support the argument that the cardinal was comfortable working with westerners and held their book art in high esteem. His books are decorated with the typical vine scroll pattern, acanthus leaves, vegetation, and birds - all in a colour palette of blues, reds, pinks and greens. The preservation of the cardinal's collection at the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice provides an opportunity to look at his decorated volumes as a comprehensive collection. In general it would seem that Bessarion was sensitive to the different cultural characteristics of the two languages and adopted appropriate visual languages for the illumination of the Greek and Latin manuscripts. Bessarion's Greek books were illuminated with decoration that other Byzantine books shared, and likewise the Latin books fit within the contemporary northern Italian style of manuscript illumination.

---

<sup>35</sup> For a full discussion of the significance of the iconography of the coat of arms see the introduction to this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, Bessarione 1-8, Books 1, 3, 7 and 8.

In some of Bessarion's volumes, key moments, such as the opening of a new chapter or a new book, are frequently highlighted, in typical fifteenth-century practice, with an illuminated initial letter (Figure 53)..<sup>37</sup> Like the coats of arms, these initials sit firmly with a traditional context of northern Italian styles in manuscript illumination. Frontispieces in books commissioned by Bessarion and his contemporaries often featured these decorated initials. In the copy of the *Works* by St Thomas Aquinas, the first Q is decorated..<sup>38</sup> It measures 50 x 50mm, and sits in a square surrounded by gold leaf. The letter itself is also written in gold. There is a green, red and blue background in the corners of the square and inside the initial. The centre of the Q contains a foliate pattern: two brown branches spring from a red and green leaf. Similarly Bessarion's *Chronicon* begins with an illuminated E: the initial is pale pink with dark pink highlights and very faint white pen flourishes..<sup>39</sup> It is set in a square on a gold background with a blue swirling pattern above and below the central bar, springing from green leaves. There are blooming pink flowers dangling from blue tendrils. The outer frame is coloured in pale pink, framed by green leaves, which in turn are framed by some sort of purple petals. It was impossible to secure a good quality image for either of these manuscripts but Bessarion's copy of *De ea parte Evangelii* (1450-70) provides a representative example of this decorative feature (Figure 54)..<sup>40</sup>

The *Letters of St Jerome* start with an illuminated C for 'Credimus in deum Patrem omnipotentam'..<sup>41</sup> This is one of the few examples in Bessarion's collection of zoomorphic figures: the C consists of two beasts with their necks extended. It is set in a square with green and gold borders. The background is of *bianchi girari* (a white vine scroll pattern) on a blue, red and green background.

---

<sup>37</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.38.

<sup>38</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.120.

<sup>39</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.348.

<sup>40</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.438.

<sup>41</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.50.

These initials can be compared with many decorated initials in books executed in Bologna, Padua and Ferrara in the second half of the fifteenth century. In Nicolosa Sanuta's *De Ornatu Mulierum*, decorated in Bologna and dated 1450-60, the frontispiece is reminiscent of many of Bessarion's Latin manuscripts (Figure 55).<sup>42</sup> The first five lines are a rubric in chrysography reading, 'Nicolosa Sanuta Bononiensis apud Regum d. D. B. Episcopum Tusculanum Card. Bononie legatum: ut mulieribus ornamenta restituantur causam agit'. Beneath the gold lettering is the initial M, also in gold on a blue background decorated with white vine scroll with red and green highlights. This is a style that appears in many of Bessarion's books such as his copy of Cicero's *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (Book 1).<sup>43</sup> The frontispiece of the Sanuta also includes a wide floral border – a common motif in Bessarion's manuscripts.<sup>44</sup> Another example of a common style of decoration, which the cardinal's Latin manuscripts share with north Italian illumination, is a gold initial within a square, outlined in blue and filled with *bianchi girari* on a red and green background. The left-hand edge of the square extends part way along the margin of the folio and is wide enough to contain the same vine scroll pattern. The British Library holds a copy of Pliny the Younger's *Letters* (Figure 56) which features this design at the start of each of the books,<sup>45</sup> a motif that can be found in many of Bessarion's books including his copy of Cicero's *Orationes*.<sup>46</sup> The Pliny was commissioned between 1450 and 1469, making it contemporaneous with Bessarion's books. According to the British Library online catalogue, it is from Ferrara – the similarity with the cardinal's volumes implying that he also employed Ferrarese artists.

The decorated works owned by the cardinal included less elaborate initials as well and these too follow western traditions in book illumination. It was common for Bessarion's manuscripts to contain initials in blue and red penwork designs.<sup>47</sup> There is no shortage of examples of books in Bessarion's collection that are decorated with an Italian stylistic scheme. By collecting these, the

<sup>42</sup> London, British Library, Sloane 2377.

<sup>43</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.411. Folio 1 is illustrated in Mioni, *Cento Codici*, fig. 56.

<sup>44</sup> For example, see Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.295; Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.304; and Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.370.

<sup>45</sup> London, British Library, Burney 230, ff. 1, 14v, 42v, 56v, 69, 83v, 97v.

<sup>46</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.428, ff. 12v, 17, 24, 37v, 40, 45v, 63v, 82v, 97v, 109v, 120, 128v, 133, 139v, 145, 166v, 184v, 211, 224, 235, 239v, 255, 269, 273v, 304, 320v, 327v, 333, 337, 354v, 356v, 364, 367.

<sup>47</sup> There is an example of this in Aquinas' *Works*, Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.120.

cardinal engaged with western craftsmen and clearly developed an aesthetic appreciation for this style. There are examples of this style in other north Italian books such as the Ferrarese copy of George of Trebizond's *De quatuor declinabilibus partibus ex Prisciani compendium*, executed in 1475..<sup>48</sup> Folio 1 begins with a decorated initial D in blue on a background of red pen design, typical of this convention (Figure 57) which is deployed over and over again in Bessarion's books.

### *Classical Motifs*

Bessarion also shared in the Italian convention of reviving what quattrocento scholars perceived to be Late Roman themes in manuscript decoration. Bessarion acquired Latin volumes with these decorative schemes; there are no similar examples among his Greek manuscripts.

By the end of the fifteenth century in Florence the medallion title – gold capitals on a coloured background, surrounded by a circular frame – had emerged in imitation of luxury manuscripts of the Late Roman period. For example, a copy of Lucius Iunius Moderatus Columella's *De re rustica*, executed in Florence between 1460 and 1470 has this feature..<sup>49</sup> Similarly, a manuscript of Quintus Horatius Flaccus's *Carmina* etc, which was illuminated in the third quarter of the fifteenth century in Florence begins with a square framed in gold with the author and title spelled out in majuscule letters (Figure 58)..<sup>50</sup> The letters are in gold on a solid blue background. Several of Bessarion's texts show what might have been the beginnings of this style with their gold lettering on the plain vellum background. Bessarion's own book on the *De Processione Sanctus Spiriti*, dedicated to Paul II, shows an early attempt to create this effect (Figure 59)..<sup>51</sup> A particularly fine example of this can be found in a text by L. Caeli Lactantius Firmianus which begins with six lines of gold capital letters reading, 'L. Coelii Lactantii Divinarum Institutionem Ad Versus Gentes Liber Primus De Falsa Religione Ad Constantinum Imperatorem Feliciter Incipit'..<sup>52</sup> In a somewhat

<sup>48</sup> London, British Library, Harley 2577.

<sup>49</sup> London, British Library, Arundel 81.

<sup>50</sup> London, British Library, Harley 3510.

<sup>51</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.135, ff.5v-6.

<sup>52</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.40.

less ambitious form the same technique is used in Bessarion's copy of a text by Valerius Maximus for the frontispiece title which appears in capital gold letters: VALERII: MAXIMI: LIBER: PRI/MVS: INCIPIT: FELICITER.

Another 'revival' of a Late Roman motif was the prolific use by illuminators in their work of putti, commonly found on second-century AD sarcophagi. Such figures are frequently depicted in Bessarion's manuscripts supporting the roundel containing the cardinal's coat of arms as in Cicero's *Orationes*.<sup>53</sup> or the naked putti with red and green wings supporting the shield in Ovid's *Works*. The motif of the putto features frequently in Bessarion's decorated manuscripts – this could be interpreted as evidence of the cardinal's conformity to trends in Renaissance book illumination. In the work by Lactantius there is a group of frolicking cupids, one of whom sits in the point of an illuminated initial M and urinates into plate held by his standing naked companion (Figure 60). Another naked boy climbs on the left-hand stem of the letter, and three putti sit on the grass, one playing a long horn-like instrument. The landscape in the background shows a terracotta coloured castello in the distance. Similarly seven nude putti decorate the frontispiece of Jerome's *Letters*. They are peculiar in appearance with their overdeveloped muscles. Two of the figures at the bottom of the page wear green wings and green bandanas. Their contours are rendered with light pink shading and they stand on green grass in three-quarter profile.

Putti abound in fifteenth-century Italian manuscripts both in the central and in the northern workshops. To cite one example, the frontispiece of St Augustine's *De civitate dei*, is decorated with the small figures playing musical instruments, clambering through the vine scroll margins and blowing heraldic trumpets...<sup>54</sup> This manuscript was executed in Padua or Verona between 1440 and 1470. According to unpublished notes of Alexander de la Mare in the Bodleian library, the scribe

---

<sup>53</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.428.

<sup>54</sup> London, British Library, Burney 292, f. 9.

may have been Gaspar da Verona writing in Padua. In the bottom margin the groups of musical putti flank the coat of arms of the patron as in the case of many of Bessarion's books..<sup>55</sup>

However, the putto may have had a more specific significance for Bessarion. It is argued by some art historians that there is a Neoplatonic context for the interpretation of the winged putto.

According to Michael Jacobsen, a fifteenth-century allegory emerged in which Cupid acquired wings to access the higher domain of the soul or the intellect from the earth..<sup>56</sup> Marsilio Ficino resurrected a Platonic idea of winged love in his work *De christiana religione*. In this text he transposes the idea of love for the concept of the soul and speaks of the spirit's (embodied in the putto) ascent to heaven on its 'Platonic wings', one of which represents the intellect and the other, desire..<sup>57</sup> If Bessarion were specifically commissioning the depiction of the putti in a large number of his manuscripts, this concept may have contributed to their appeal. This theme of a Platonic median between earth and heaven appeared again in a visual form in the cardinal's burial chapel with his host of angels..<sup>58</sup>

## The Decoration of the Greek Books

The decorated Greek books which Bessarion owned reveal a complicated story about the cardinal's attitude towards manuscript illumination and his ownership of luxury books. For the most part, those in Latin always have a 'western' character (as described above) and those in Greek conform to a Byzantine stylistic vocabulary with its geometric patterns and restricted colour palette. There are, however, some exceptions to the Greek texts, which nuance this conclusion.

---

<sup>55</sup> The arms belong to the Capodilista family of Padua, and the shields suspended in the outer right-hand margin of folio 9 belong to the Donati family of Venice.

<sup>56</sup> Armstrong, *Renaissance Miniature Painters and Classical Imagery*, 75-76; Jacobsen, 'Vulcan Forging Cupid's Wings', 418-29.

<sup>57</sup> Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 1: 'Nam cum animus (ut Platoni nostro placet) duabus tantum alis, id est, intellectu et voluntate possit ad coelestem patrem, et patriam revolare...'

<sup>58</sup> See chapter 2 of the present dissertation.

There are two types of illuminated book that must be considered when assessing Cardinal Bessarion's interest in decorated Greek text. The first concerns books that he collected and the second, books that he commissioned. It is difficult to determine which books the cardinal actively commissioned and which he acquired readymade. However we know he was ordering copies from scratch of certain books, for example his commission for a copy of all the books in the University of Bologna's collection. As was discussed in a previous chapter, Bessarion's 'academy' was a home for exiled scribes and illuminators, and he may even have had his own workshop..<sup>59</sup>

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, several art historians have overlooked Bessarion as a patron of illuminated manuscripts. While at first glance, the restricted decoration of his Greek manuscripts might imply that the cardinal was concerned firstly with content and secondly with appearance, a close examination of Bessarion's books will reveal that he had a substantial collection of decorated texts and that some of these had unique qualities that imply Bessarion's personal preferences. Admittedly, Greek illumination does seem to have been harder to come by. Byzantine manuscript art, according to the art historian Hugo Buchthal, reached its peak of inventiveness and experimentation with complicated patterns in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Much of the later illuminated texts such as a Gospel of St Matthew (Vat.gr.1158) drew on these manuscripts as models but for the most part were rather limited in their repertoire of decoration..<sup>60</sup> Many of Bessarion's books were commissioned in the fifteenth century, and the Byzantine nature of the designs would indicate that the illuminators were Greek contemporaries. However Palaeologan illustration is restricted for the most part to portraits of the Evangelists and headpieces on the incipit page (Figures 61 and 62)..<sup>61</sup> Bessarion was not the only owner of a substantial collection of Greek books – the civil servant and scholar Niccolò Niccoli gathered a significant

---

<sup>59</sup> Very little seems to be known about this group and it certainly was not an 'academy' with a formal structure or institutional definition.

<sup>60</sup> Square headpieces at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew are based on a pattern in the Melbourne Gospels, illuminated in around 1100. Buchthal, 'Illuminations from an Early Palaeologan Scriptorium', 51.

<sup>61</sup> (Figure 61) London, British Library, Burney 18, f.101. Buchthal states that 'narrative scenes are the exception rather than the rule.' Buchthal, 'Illuminations from an Early Palaeologan Scriptorium', 48. (Figure 62) Venice, Biblioteca Malatestiana, Marc.gr.z.8. Buchthal's chapter discusses the decline of manuscript illumination in Late Palaeologan Byzantium. Hugo Buchthal, 'Toward a History of Palaeologan Illumination'.

number and these too were minimally decorated..<sup>62</sup> This relative minimalism features in Bessarion's collection, supporting Buchthal's theory that book illustration in the later Byzantine period (from 1261 onwards) was 'in decline, the sumptuous miniatures being a relic of the past'

Bessarion's appreciation of textual illumination is revealed in his frequent descriptions of books as 'beautiful' in several *ex libris* texts written by the cardinal. In an article surveying the Greek manuscripts in Italy, the scholar Robert Nelson proposes that Italians were the main protagonists in the collection and preservation of Greek manuscripts in the fifteenth century..<sup>63</sup> It is arguable that the decoration which Bessarion commissioned and collected reflected the preoccupations of the westerners to whom ultimately he donated his library. Indeed, the cardinal's campaign to preserve Greek manuscripts might be seen as a programme of cultural appropriation for the benefit of the Italian scholarly community. One of the results that Bessarion achieved through his collection was to make Greek literature more accessible to the West, and the decorative schemes could be argued to be appealing to Italian as well as Greek preferences. Italians were attracted to old manuscripts, preferably written in uncials, the majuscule script used by Greek scribes between the third and eighth centuries AD. As early as the end of the fourteenth century, the scholar Coluccio Salutati spoke of his search for a manuscript of Homer 'grossis litteris et in pergamenis', and later Francesco Filelfo also expressed his preference for books in uncials..<sup>64</sup> Bessarion owned several early texts such as a ninth-century copy of Homer..<sup>65</sup>

### *Bessarion's Agenda for Decorated Books: The Palimpsest*

It is a tenth-century manuscript that provides evidence that Cardinal Bessarion was conscious of aesthetic considerations in the Greek manuscripts that he collected or commissioned. The

---

<sup>62</sup> Nelson, 'The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts', 220.

<sup>63</sup> Nelson, 'The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts', 211.

<sup>64</sup> Nelson, 'The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts', 233, n. 174; Wilson, *From Byzantium*, 8, 53. The quotation from Salutati is cited by Wilson, *From Byzantium*, 8, n.2.

<sup>65</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.454.



manuscript in question is a Greek Evangeliary..<sup>66</sup> This ancient book was hacked up and parts rubbed out by Ioannes Rhosos to enhance the gloss which he transcribed in the margins..<sup>67</sup> Rhosos was a scribe and familiar of the cardinal, who may have added him to his coterie of exiled craftsmen and scholars..<sup>68</sup> Whether or not the cardinal was responsible for the treatment of the manuscript, it ended up in his collection. As there was no shortage of Greek Evangeliaries in Bessarion's library, it might be surmised that he was attracted more by the decorative features of this copy than by the text content. The scribe excised initials from another unidentified manuscript and glued them into the gloss text. The illumination is typical of northern Italian decorated letters. These illuminated initials measure approximately 60mm in height, outlined in gold and filled with blue, green and red with white highlights at the start of each reading. Each section is illustrated with a title written in gold lettering and framed by a rectangle composed of a floral design in blue, red and green on a gold background. There are flourishes at the corners. The palimpsest measures 320 x 240mm and the ancient text is written in Greek over two columns in biblical majuscules. It is a collection of readings for the Christian year, beginning with moveable feasts from Easter to Pentecost, followed by the immoveable festivals which have been divided into months (September to February and August are present). Finally there is a set of readings for eventualities such as seeking rain.

Apart from the fifteenth-century manuscript cannibalized for its initials, a second unidentified Byzantine manuscript appears to have been the source for two inserted miniatures of St Mark and St Luke. A full page portrait of Mark appears on folio 65v. The juxtaposition of Byzantine script and miniatures with contemporary Italian illuminated initials seems to be a phenomenon that conforms to the actions of the cardinal throughout his career that resulted in furthering the integration of the Greek into a Latin cultural framework.

---

<sup>66</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.12. I have sadly been unable to obtain an illustration from this manuscript.

<sup>67</sup> Nelson, 'The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts', 230; Mioni, 'Bessarione scriba e alcune suoi collaboratori', 303. This manuscript is illustrated in Furlan, *Codici greci*, I, fig. 31.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of Bessarion's patronage of intellectuals and his 'academy', see Chapter 1, pp. 21-3 of the present thesis.

St Mark is seated on a low chair in three-quarter profile holding a book with a jewelled cover in gold and red. His chin rests on his left hand, and he wears a pink mantle over a green robe and sandals on his feet. To the right of the picture, in front of Mark, is a lectern with a cupboard full of bottles of writing ink and pens. What appears to be a curtain swag at the top of the image has been badly damaged. The scene takes place against a gold background surrounded by a blue border with circles inscribed with flowers in white and green, and red petals between the circles. The full-page portrait of Luke is on folio 84v. He is seated on a stool writing on a tablet with his right hand. Again, he is shown in three-quarter profile. He wears a blue gown with a lighter robe on top, sandals, and a halo. In front of him is a lectern with a book, and beneath there is a cupboard and table with writing implements. The same gold background with curtain swags at the top make this an evident partner to the portrait of Mark. It is framed in an identical floral pattern. The other two evangelists are missing suggesting that they did not survive undamaged and were discarded by the fifteenth-century Rhosos. Hugo Buchthal argues that from 1261 onwards, Palaeologan artists commonly painted portraits of the Evangelists on separate leaves and inserted them haphazardly into texts with no relationship to each other or the overall scheme..<sup>69</sup> The palimpsest appears to conform to that practice.

### *Greek Books Commissioned in the Fifteenth Century*

By examining a selection of the Greek manuscripts in the Biblioteca Marciana described as decorated, it is evident that Bessarion owned and probably commissioned illustrated works, though few of them could be described as elaborate. This seems to conform to the overall pattern of Byzantine book illumination described in the post 1261 period. The restricted palette – carmine with yellow highlights for the most part – and basic repetitive geometric patterns in a significant number of Bessarion's fifteenth-century manuscripts were typical of the Greek illuminators or scribes he used to decorate the Greek books. A fifteenth-century book of Eusebius Pamphili's

---

<sup>69</sup> Buchthal suggests that miniatures may have been executed in special ateliers and inserted at a later date. Buchthal, 'Illuminations from an Early Palaeologan Scriptorium', 48.

*Ecclesiastical History* and other writers is characteristic of the style..<sup>70</sup> The manuscript is large, measuring 370 x 265mm and the text is written over one column. Folio 1 begins with two bands in a red lattice pattern. Throughout the work these bands, alternating between the lattice and a foliate design, separate two texts. As the art historian Alison Frantz describes in great detail, the lattice design or *guilloche* was used throughout the Byzantine period..<sup>71</sup> This headpiece, in the shape of a square or an oblong, became a Byzantine ornamental convention used at the beginning of a book or a chapter. Throughout the text, flower and leaf arrangements were popular and geometrical elements were repeated in the forms of circles, lozenges and quatrefoils. These are motifs that appear repeatedly in the fifteenth-century copies of texts that Bessarion owned. Byzantine art also evolved the 'tessellated' ornament – bodies of interlaced fretwork, and twining branches in gold or white on background of varied colours. Bessarion's books were not unusual in their use of these designs. A comparative example of this can be found in the British Library in a copy of the Four Gospels from the Monastery of Philokalos in Thessalonica (1291 or 1292) (Figure 63). The tessellation has been used in the illuminated headpiece and initial B at the beginning of the Gospel of St Matthew..<sup>72</sup> These elements were complemented by zigzag, crenellated and chevron (or herringbone) patterns..<sup>73</sup> The decorated braided headpiece at the beginning of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, executed in Crete in 1361-62 demonstrates the prevalence of this type of pattern..<sup>74</sup> It was not unusual to find gold backgrounds and colour ranges of blue, red and green in Byzantine books, and Bessarion's were no exception. These illuminated headpieces in many of the cardinal's texts were highlighted with minute touches of white. Such practices were common, as in the case of another volume of the Four Gospels in the British Library (Constantinople, 1366)..<sup>75</sup> In addition there are illustrated initials, consisting of a scrolling foliate pattern in red ink. Often these have yellow highlights as in the illuminated initials in a fifteenth-century copy owned by the cardinal of Plutarch's *Lives*..<sup>76</sup> It is clear that the majority of Bessarion's illuminated Greek books were

<sup>70</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.337.

<sup>71</sup> Frantz, 'Byzantine Illuminated Ornament', 53-54.

<sup>72</sup> British Library, Burney 21, f. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Frantz gives a survey of the development of the guilloche as a motif in the Byzantine world from the ninth century in 'Byzantine Illuminated Ornament', 43.

<sup>74</sup> British Library, Burney 50, vol. I, f. 2.

<sup>75</sup> British Library, Burney 18, ff. 63, 101, 163.

<sup>76</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.384.

executed by practising Greek artists well versed in the Byzantine stylistic vocabulary of the fifteenth century.

### *Western Motifs in Greek Books*

However, there are a handful of Greek books in Bessarion's collection that deviate from the traditional Byzantine style of illumination, indicating cross-cultural influences. Although we are lacking documentary evidence that would prove conclusively that Bessarion commissioned these books, the unusual combination of Byzantine and western traditions might lead us to ask whether the cardinal's footprint can be detected in these commissions. It is significant, though, that this had an impact on the appearance of the Greek manuscripts only: in some instances they feature elements that were more often seen in Italian manuscripts. There is no evidence in the Latin manuscripts to suggest that the influences went the other way. In the course of this research the lack of attention that this phenomenon has generated in the secondary literature makes it an interesting avenue to explore.

A Bible, belonging to the cardinal, dating from the fifteenth century, is one of these exceptions to the general rule whereby Bessarion's Byzantine books were decorated in an exclusively Greek style.<sup>77</sup> On folio 1, in the left-hand margin, there is a series of roundels stacked on top of each other to form an historiated I for the start of the Book of Genesis in which the illuminator has illustrated the opening to the story of Genesis (Figure 64). Although this is a Greek text, the illustrator has chosen to follow the format of a thirteenth-century western historiated initial. It is interesting that the illuminator is using such an archaic iconographic scheme. I have been unable to identify fourteenth or fifteenth-century versions of this type of initial in Italian versions of the Book of Genesis.

---

<sup>77</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.5.

Typical examples of this layout can be found in the Abbey Bible produced in Bologna in the 1200s and now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, and in the mid-thirteenth-century Bible of Robert de Bello in the British Library (Figure 65).<sup>78</sup> The initial illustrated from the Robert de Bello Bible seems to be a compositional type that inspired the decoration of Bessarion's text. In the historiated initial of Bessarion's book, the first scene shows a bearded figure representing God in a blue gown and pink cloak holding a globe divided into three and gesturing with his right hand. In the roundel below, the same figure stands in front of blue water with waves. Beneath this scene, God creates plant life – a tree looms behind the divine figure. This is followed by the creation of the animals, and there is a bull and some cattle in the right-hand of the roundel. God then makes the moon and the sun – these hang in the sky surrounded by stars. In the penultimate roundel He creates man, depicted by a naked figure with a halo lying prone. Finally God is depicted frontally holding a book, which may be Genesis. This represents the final day of rest in the traditional Creation sequence.

There are also examples of Greek books that look just like their most richly decorated Latin counterparts. Bessarion owned a copy of Plato's *Works*, measuring 455 x 280mm, which dates to the fifteenth century according to Zanetti's catalogue entry.<sup>79</sup> It has a decorated frontispiece on folio 5. A full page frame wraps around the text. In the lower margin naked winged putti flank Bessarion's arms. The arms are depicted in a gold medallion and show the blue shield with a red Russian Cross held by two hands in brown and red sleeves. This is surmounted by a cloud with rays and a cardinal's hat. It is more clumsily executed than other examples in the cardinal's collection. The putti have gold wings, and the one on the left holds a lute while the one on the right holds a tambourine. In the right-hand margin are two portrait medallions, one showing a young figure in profile wearing a helmet. In the roundel beneath the youth is a bearded, elderly man wearing a hood. The *bianchi girari* of the left-hand border contains two partridges and two butterflies, and in the top margin the face of a putto peers over the edge of a roundel. The text is framed by a wide border of white vine rinceaux, filled with butterflies, ladybirds, a resting deer, birds and frolicking putti. The cardinal's arms are repeated twice: in the lower and upper margins.

<sup>78</sup> London, British Library, Burney 3, f. 5v.

<sup>79</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.248.

Illuminated initials throughout the text are in gold on a background of *bianchi girari*. This is a Greek manuscript made to look like a Latin one, suggesting that an Italian illuminator was given the commission to execute the decoration. Is this an example of Bessarion's efforts to present Greek philosophy to a Latin audience? By using western visual language, the cardinal was communicating with the Italian humanist audience.

The manuscript of Plato's *Dialogues*: the Republic, Timaeus, Critias, Minos, De Legibus, and the Letters present a very unusual set of illustrations..<sup>80</sup> The book measures 260 x 180mm and dates to the fifteenth century. The table of contents (ff. 1-1v) is decorated with the traditional Byzantine lattice band in red ink. However on folio 2 this lattice band is coloured in red and blue and highlighted with gold then framed in a pattern of green grass. These rather Italian colours are repeated in the illuminated K on the same folio, but in the Byzantine lattice and knot pattern with traces of silver. The bulk of the text is divided by illuminated initials in the Greek style but enhanced with highlights of gold and silver. Intriguingly, though, some of the letters deviate from this design. Several of the initials consist of zoomorphic forms (Figure 66). These motifs are mostly found in western, not Greek, manuscripts. There is an illuminated ε on folio 13 composed of a red zoomorphic figure and shaded with blue, gold and green, a style characteristic of north Italian book illumination. Again, on folio 58 an O is formed by two naked figures in red ink embracing. There are gold and brown ink flourishes above and below the letter. An M is made up of a sort of *bianchi girari* vine on a background of blue and green. At the start of a new book (fol. 107v) there is a band with the same vine pattern emerging, this time, from the mouth of a beast on a blue background with gold highlights. There are foliate flourishes at corners and in the centre in blue, green and red. Below an illuminated ε is composed of both a zoomorphic figure and a foliate pattern. On folio 193 two texts are separated with a gold bar with three knots in red, blue and green. The bar ends in a profusion of foliage. Commencing the text is an illuminated π - the initial rests on a grotesque head, and zoomorphic figures form the legs of the letter. This manuscript is a riot of western styles and Byzantine traditions.

---

<sup>80</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.gr.z.187.

Bessarion commissioned an unusual copy of St Augustine's *De Trinitate*.<sup>81</sup> It is another embodiment of combined Greek and Italian traditions. The text has been written over two columns: the left in Greek and the right in a Latin translation. This manuscript embodies much of what was unique in Bessarion's cultural programme. St Augustine's text was a recognised Neoplatonic work, which Bessarion was known to admire and whose philosophy he drew on in his own scholarship. It was a bilingual translation and the question arises of its intended readership. Bessarion is credited for making Greek texts more accessible to westerners but here is an instance in which the cardinal owned (and possibly commissioned) a Latin text rendered into Greek. Could this, like the plan to transmit cultural traditions from the West to Byzantium through the Cesena choir books, be another effort to make the West more accessible to the Byzantines? An alternative interpretation might be that the cardinal saw the manuscript as a means to teach Italians the Greek language by providing a Greek translation of a text with which western scholars were familiar. It is not possible to determine with certainty the identity of the cardinal's intended readership, but the presence of this volume in his collection is evidence of his familiarity with a significant Latin text and with Italian decorative schemes.

The book was evidently illustrated by a western workshop. Its illustration is typically Italian: there are vine rinceaux, putti, pink and blue and green colouring with gold highlighting. Bessarion's arms feature in their usual form in the lower margin. There is, however, an addition to the traditional motifs found in many of the cardinal's manuscripts. An illuminated L ('Lecturus hec que de trinitate differimus') on folio 1v contains a depiction of St Augustine with a gold halo, bishop's mitre, and red gown (Figure 67). He is seated at a desk writing on a paper with both hands, perhaps symbolising the Greek and Latin versions over which he presides. The back of his chair is shaped like a polyptych against a black background with gold flourishes. Again, the palette, physiognomy and anatomy of the figure of St Augustine are consistent with Italian miniatures.

---

<sup>81</sup> Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Marc.lat.z.62.

Left-handedness was an issue in art and philosophy, and so far art historians have not considered that in this case it may be significant that St Augustine holds a pen in both hands.

Ambidexterity is discussed by Plato as the ideal state and man was exhorted to learn to use both his hands as the right way to achieve spiritual ambidexterity..<sup>82</sup> Aristotle, however, viewed things a little differently, writing

For instance if we all constantly practised throwing with our left hands, we should all become ambidextrous; yet the left hand is such by nature, and the right is none the less superior to the left, however much we equalize the use of the two. Change of use does not abolish the natural distinction..<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

This examination of the illuminated manuscripts in the cardinal's library has addressed a frequently overlooked aspect of Bessarion's cultural patronage. His major projects such as the choir books in Cesena, and the missal donated to the Franciscans as well as the palimpsest in Greek are evidence that he was a keen patron of illuminated books. This enthusiasm makes the cardinal a typical book collector in the humanist tradition of fifteenth-century Italy. Through visual statements like his coat of arms, portraits, and classical motifs Bessarion was communicating his patronal status and personality.

He employed both Greek and Latin illuminators to produce imagery that was fitting for the nature and character of the text. However, he also experimented with decorating Greek texts in a Latin style. This was perhaps a reflection of his sensitivity towards his western audience. In a climate of

---

<sup>82</sup> Hall refers to Plato's implication in *Laws* that ambidexterity was the original state of Man. Hall, *The Sinister Side*, 18, 296, n.20. He cites Plato, *Laws*, ed. R.G. Bury, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, II, 794e.

<sup>83</sup> McManus, *Right Hand, Left Hand*, 158.



expanding knowledge of the Greek language, Bessarion was preparing the works he wanted his fellow scholars to access in a visual language that would resonate with their culture. It was with the same degree of flexibility and sensitivity that Bessarion would turn his attention to printing as another medium by which to influence the intellectual environment around him.

## Chapter 6: Bessarion and the Printed Book

Cardinal Bessarion's involvement in the emerging printing scene in Italy during the 1460s and 1470s could be seen as a case study in the engagement of a fifteenth-century western scholar in the new media. His contribution took the form of building a pioneering collection of printed books, and he was also one of the earliest contemporary authors to have his work printed. As a patron of Giovanni Bussi, the most renowned editor in Rome, Bessarion was in a good position to influence the printing programme that Bussi orchestrated. In addition, the cardinal's influence spread north into Europe thanks to his relationship with the French editor and printer Guillaume Fichet. Bessarion was quick to appreciate the potential of the printed word for spreading propaganda, in particular to establish his argument in the Aristotle-Plato debate, and to generate support for his Crusade campaign. Although Bessarion did not directly commission his own press, printing played a significant role in the spreading of his intellectual and cultural interests and position.

Few scholars have tackled the subject of Bessarion's role in the printing movement. While the study of the cardinal's direct engagement in this phenomenon is limited by the circumstantial nature of the evidence, it is probable that he was involved to some degree. We have no direct statement from Bessarion about his position in the flourishing public discussion on the relative merits of printing, however he had an interest in science, engineering and books. Printing combined all three of these and there is evidence that it provided Bessarion with another avenue to act as an influential patron. In addition we have prefaces to printed editions of the Classics that discuss and praise Bessarion. Combined with his own publications and the printed books he owned in his collection, these texts reveal that Bessarion had an interest in printing. This chapter is an assessment of these sources in the context of the emerging print industry in Italy.

Examining the extent of Bessarion's participation in the printing movement suggests that the cardinal had a role at the forefront of an exclusively western project. The technology of printing was developed in Europe, and Bessarion made no evident effort to harness the industry for a Greek

agenda.<sup>1</sup> The incunabula that he owned were almost exclusively works by Latin authors and the printing programme with which he was associated produced a reading list that was meant to be representative of a classical Latin education. Bessarion also seems to have had a high profile as a patron in a network of western scholars who were linked to printing – Giovanni Bussi, Niccolò Perotti, Nicholas of Cusa and Guillaume Fichet. The two major works by Bessarion that were printed - his book on the Aristotle-Plato controversy and his propaganda piece for the Crusade - dealt with the issues that Bessarion engaged with in the West. The cardinal's role in the printing industry reflects yet another avenue in which he could absorb and contribute to western culture.

Cardinal Bessarion was among a group of pioneering clerics who were interested in the emerging printing industry. These interests placed him at the forefront of western technology. Among those advocating the use of this medium was Bessarion's friend, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) who wrote to Cardinal Juan de Carvajal (c.1400-69) about the 42-line Gutenberg Bible that he had access to while he was in Frankfurt in 1454:

What was written to me about that marvellous man seen at Frankfurt is entirely true. I have not seen complete Bibles but only a number of quires of various books [of the Bible]. The script is extremely neat and legible, not at all difficult to follow. Your grace would be able to read it without effort, and indeed without glasses. Several people told me that 158 copies have been finished, though others say there are 180. I'm not certain of the exact number but I'm in no doubt that the volumes are finished, if my informants are to be trusted. Had I known your wishes I should certainly have brought you a copy – some quires were actually brought here to the emperor. I shall try and see if I can have a copy for sale brought here which I can purchase on your behalf. But I fear that won't be possible, both because of the length of the journey and because buyers were said to be lined up even before the books were finished.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Aldus Manutius (1449-1515) was the first to master the mass production of printed books in Greek.

<sup>2</sup> De viro illo mirabili apud Francfordiam viso nihil falsi ad me scriptum est. Non vidi Biblias integras sed quinterniones aliquot diversorum librorum mundissime ac correctissime littere, nulla in parte mendaces, quos tua dignatio sine labore et absque berillo legeret. Volumina centum et quinquaginta octo absoluta esse ex

This letter offers evidence about perceptions of early printing that would apply ten years later to the arrival of printing in Italy and to the context in which Cardinal Bessarion's involvement should be understood. Firstly, Bessarion was not the only cardinal to show an interest in the new technology and its potential. Evidently Piccolomini thought that this Bible would impress Carvajal and that it was worth describing in some detail. At the end of the 1460s, Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa would also be mentioned in relation to printing by the editor Giovanni Andrea Bussi in the prefaces to several of the editions he worked on.

### Bessarion's Collection

A comment by the famous bookseller, Vespasiano da Bisticci might, at face value, indicate that the cardinal was not an advocate of the new medium:

The envoys of Cardinal Bessarion, when they saw for the first time a printed book in the house of Constantine Lascaris, laughed at the discovery 'made among the barbarians of some German city'..<sup>3</sup>

This reported statement made by the bookseller gives the impression that Cardinal Bessarion was a critic of printed books. However, the evidence below does not support such a conclusion. It seems plausible that Vespasiano was casting about for authorities to back his criticisms of a technology that he perceived to be a threat to his livelihood.

The strongest evidence for Bessarion's involvement in the print trade lies in an analysis of his book collection. Of approximately 800 texts, around twenty-two are printed..<sup>4</sup> Four of these are on

---

pluribus testibus didici quamvis aliqui centum et octoginta esse confirmaverint. De numero mihi non plane constat, de perfectione voluminum, si fides habenda est hominibus, non sum dubius. Si scivissem desiderium tuum, emissem unum procul dubio volumen. Quinterniones eciam aliquot hic ad Cesarem delati sunt. Conabor si poterit fieri aliquam huc bibliam venalem afferri eamque tui causa comparabo. Quod timeo ne fieri possit, et propter distantiam itineris et quia antequam perficerentur volumina paratos emptores fuisse tradunt. (Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini to Juan de Carvajal on the 42-line Bible. 1480 reproduction. Cambridge, Trinity College, Grylls 3.352, sig. ql v). Translation by Laura Bolick.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, I, 204.

<sup>4</sup> These figures are found in Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana*, 481-82.

vellum and the remainder are on paper..<sup>5</sup> This means that three percent of his library is in print format – a significant proportion given the newness of the medium, although in less than a century these book collection statistics were reversed. By the 1480s around twenty percent of a collection might consist of printed books..<sup>6</sup>

These printed books in Bessarion's collection are representative of his tastes for Latin texts, and include Cicero's *Epistulae familiares* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Inc. Marcian. 202), Apuleius' *Opera* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Inc. Marcian. membran. 15bis), Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Inc. Marcian. 102) and Quintilian's, *Institutio oratoria* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Inc. Marcian. 213). His theological interests can be identified in a printed copy of the letters of Jerome (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Inc. Marcian. Membran. 1-2) and in some texts by the medieval teachers. He also had printed copies of Thomas Aquinas' *Catena Aurea* (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Inc. Marcian. 100-101) and Nicholas de Lyra's (1270-1340) gloss on the Old Testament (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Inc. Marcian. 111)..<sup>7</sup> Bessarion's collection of printed books reflected the profile of his handwritten manuscript collection of western authors in his library.

A large fraction of the cardinal's printed collection contained works by contemporary writers, perhaps reflecting his appreciation as a living author for the potential of the new technology to achieve greater exposure. Bessarion owned a printed copy of his own work *In calumniatorem platonis*, as well as works by Leonardo Bruni, Guillaume Fichet and the Spaniard Rodrigo Sánchez di Arévalo.

---

<sup>5</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz', 314.

<sup>6</sup> This statistic is based on information in Bertola, 'Incunaboli esistenti nella Biblioteca Vaticana'; Sartori, 'Documenti padovani sull'arte della stampa', docs 67 and 70; Connell, 'Books and their Owners in Venice'; Franceschini, 'Codici e libro a stampa'; Bertoni, *La Biblioteca Estense*, 235-52; Verde, *Lo Studio fiorentino*, II, 256-58, 328-35; Omont, 'Inventaire'; and Bresc, *Livre et société*. Marino Zorzi's survey of Venetian book collections in the first half of the sixteenth century revealed that in collections of more than a thousand books only around ten to twenty per cent were manuscripts and the rest were printed. In 1526 the patrician Antonio Pesaro's collection of 155 books included only 12 manuscripts while in 1560 the surgeon Giorgio de Agaris owned a mere 19 manuscripts out of 240 books. Zorzi, 'La Circolazione del libro a Venezia', 117-89.

<sup>7</sup> Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana*, 481-82.

One of the rarely considered observations to be made from this close examination of the profile of Bessarion's printed collection is the near-omission of Greek writers. His copy of Strabo's *Geographia* is the one exception.<sup>8</sup> Obviously the cardinal's access to books was limited by what the printers were producing, but his direct and indirect influence on the nature of their production makes this absence all the more perplexing. Printers did not yet have the ability to print Greek letters, but there was a major movement to translate ancient Greek and Byzantine texts into Latin in fifteenth-century Italy and these books were made available in print. Bessarion himself was the translator of a renowned version of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. From 1469-72 most of these translated works were issued in Rome and Venice, although a version of Plato's *Opera* was printed in Cosimo de Medici's Florence. The number of Greek texts available in Latin translation was quite substantial.<sup>9</sup> In 1470 Aesop's *Fabulae*, Dio Chrysostomus' *De regno*, Lucian's *Dialogi* and Plutarch's *Vitae Parallelae* were published. Plutarch's *Moralia*, *Apophthegmata* and *De liberis educandis* were issued in 1471 and by 1472 Appianus' *Historia romana* and Aristotle's *De Anima* were available.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, it was the case that a select few texts were issued repeatedly: works by Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates and Ptolemy's *Geographia*.<sup>11</sup>

It is arguable that Bessarion's preference for standard Latin texts and humanist works in the printed format raises questions about the conventional interpretation that the cardinal's main agenda when he assembled his library was the preservation of Greek books. Printing was a vehicle for potential mass dissemination, and Bessarion was implicated in the patronage of the programme (discussed in detail below) which the printers Sweynheym and Pannartz put together of Latin authors, Church Fathers and contemporary intellectuals. Evidently the cardinal had aspirations for making these works more widely available than they would have been if they had only remained in the format of

---

<sup>8</sup> Jones, *Printing the Classical Text*, 29, n. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolph Hirsch has published a table of Greek works printed in a Latin translation between 1469 and 1500 and describes the number as 'quite impressive'. Hirsch, 'Early Printed Latin Translations of Greek Texts', Section VI.

<sup>10</sup> These texts are listed in Hirsch's table. Hirsch, 'Early Printed Latin Translations of Greek Texts', Section VI.

<sup>11</sup> Books on the sciences and medicine were popular candidates for translation in the fifteenth century. Hirsch, 'Early Printed Latin Translations of Greek Texts', n.p.

the handwritten manuscript. He was less concerned to achieve this with translations of Greek texts. If Bessarion were merely a conduit between two cultures then why did he miss this opportunity to mass market his Greek heritage? It may not be possible to answer this question with any definitive answer, but in the context of this thesis, it might be possible to argue that this is further evidence of Bessarion's absorption into his Latin environment. The cardinal was not sponsoring a programme of printed translations of Greek texts although he was prioritizing classical Latin authors, who were the substance of the intellectual life in fifteenth-century Rome.

### **Sweynheym and Pannartz and the Classical Programme**

The first printing press in Rome was founded by the Germans Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz.<sup>12</sup> The scholar Victor Scholderer has proposed that Bessarion was influential in the development of the printing programme that the printers established to put together a 'classical library'.<sup>13</sup> Certainly the character of the programme matched Bessarion's intellectual interests and seemed to mirror themes in the cardinal's own library.

Italian printing would be based in the centre of Rome but initially Sweynheym and Pannartz set up their operation in the Benedictine monastery at Subiaco. The invitation to Subiaco, issued in the 1460s, is conventionally attributed to the Spanish Dominican cardinal, Juan de Torquemada (1388-1468), who was the patron of the institution.<sup>14</sup> It is suggested by some scholars that the Germans took over a printing press that had already been established by the local Benedictine monks.<sup>15</sup> Benedetto Zwink (d. 1492), a member of the community, gave an account of the monks' work, recording that they had a tradition of producing books including breviaries and St Augustine's *De*

---

<sup>12</sup> Although Gutenberg's printing press had been in operation in the north since 1450, the first printed Italian edition was not issued until October 1465. The historian Victor Scholderer attributes the delay to lower demand for printed material in the south where communications were good and where academies and humanists had networks of book exchanges. Scholderer, 'Printers and Readers', 202.

<sup>13</sup> Scholderer, 'Printers and Readers', 203.

<sup>14</sup> Fuessel, *Gutenberg and the Impact of Printing*, 62.

<sup>15</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz', 283. For further discussion around the question of why the Germans came to Italy see Carosi, *Subiaco e l'introduzione della stampa in Italia*; and Ludovici, 'La introduzione della stampa in Italia', 9-35.

*civitate Dei*, although he does not give us a date for this work.<sup>16</sup> Italy, with its deep tradition of scholarship, was an obvious market for printed works, and the printers may have been additionally motivated to leave their native Germany by the perpetual warring between imperial states that destabilized all industries. Between 1465 and 1467 Sweynheym and Pannartz worked in Subiaco until they moved their press to the Roman palazzo of the De Massimi brothers.<sup>17</sup> Despite the emergence of competition from other printers such as Ulrich Han, Sweynheym and Pannartz dominated the printing scene in Rome until 1471 when they encountered severe financial difficulties..<sup>18</sup>

Sweynheym and Pannartz afforded the cardinal the opportunity to disseminate his humanist agenda, to be involved with the latest developments in printing, and to add to his book collection. The Germans printed a range of texts with which the educated humanist should be familiar. Evidence of Bessarion's involvement can be identified in the printing of his own works, in the active engagement of his familiars with Sweynheym and Pannartz, and in the evolution of the printing programme which reflected the cardinal's humanist interests. By directly or indirectly championing this programme, Bessarion was contributing to the development of Italian scholarship and consolidating his position as a leading intellectual in the West.

At first the Germans seemed to choose to print editions of works that followed the Latin humanist scholar, Leonardo Bruni's reading list recommendations in his educational tract, *De studiis et litteris tractatulus ad Baptistam Malatestam* (c. 1423-26).<sup>19</sup> The philosophical agenda was the promotion of Latin as a living language and the Latin writer as a model for contemporary life,

---

<sup>16</sup> 'Item si ordinate in divino officio subito mente non possunt concordari, paulatim componant unam formam breviarii, quae videlicet regula se conformet cum rubrica romana, et ex post, si non omnia monasteria sint in puncto ad centa volumina possunt scribi in quacumque littera in torcularibus, sicut et nos scripsims ducenta volumina s. Augustini de civitate dei, in casu posito, quo se talis unio religionis dilataret usque ad nos, per essent, per omnia monasteria sibi invicem coniuncta possent scribi et dilatari. Benedetto Zwink, *Memoriale seu epistola ad Laurentium Abbatem Gottwicensem de vita sua et monachorum in monasterio Sublacensi*.'

<sup>17</sup> Scholderer, 'Printers and Readers', 203. Modigliani, *Tipografia*, 7-56, 81-91; *Catalogue of Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century*, IV, vii-xiii; Farenga, 'Il sistema delle dediche'.

<sup>18</sup> Hall, *Sweynheym and Pannartz and the Origins of Printing in Italy*, 96-100.

<sup>19</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 290. Leonardo Bruni Aretino, 'De Studiis et Litteris', in Aretino, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, 5-19.



using Latin originals exclusively and translations from the Greek classics and Church Fathers. Bruni explained how instruction must begin with a grasp of Latin grammar.<sup>20</sup> The next stage involved reading the Church Fathers, especially Lactantius,<sup>21</sup> and finally the humanist could progress to the pagan writers: Cicero for his language and style; along with Virgil, Sallust and Livy.<sup>22</sup>

The printers followed this agenda with very few exceptions, and their first known work was a Latin grammar, the *Ars minor* of Donatus.<sup>23</sup> Their next project was a text by Lactantius, the 'Christian Cicero', published on 29 October 1465. Sweynheym and Pannartz issued fourteen editions of this first edition – a testament to its popularity. In 1467 they produced Cicero's *De oratore* and St Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.<sup>24</sup> When the press actually moved to Rome, they re-issued their unusual trio of *De oratore*, Lactantius and *De civitate Dei*, seemingly making a statement about the 'the compatibility of Christian piety, rhetorical virtuosity, and classical culture'.<sup>25</sup> This was also a reflection of Bessarion's intellectual agenda, expressed through the cardinal's efforts to collect classical literature and to reconcile ancient philosophy with Christianity, objectives that resonate in many of his cultural projects.

---

<sup>20</sup> 'There is another stronger type of instruction, less useful for boys than for adults; it is used by those who are called grammarians, who effect to pursue with great singular labour the certain discipline of letters. By this means they could grasp Servius Honaratus and Priscianus of Caesarea.' (Est aliud genus praeceptionis robustius, ne tam pueris quam adultis perutile; eorum scilicet, qui grammatici appellantur, qui longo labore singula persecuti disciplinam quandam litterarum effecerunt. Quo in genere Servius Honaratus et Priscianus Caesariensis haberi possunt.) Aretino, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> 'Certainly the one who reads them will report back with authority on the custom and usage of these things. Therefore he will delight in the well being of his letters as a servile wife, he grasps Augustine and Jerome through them, even the others who are not the same such as Ambrose or Cyprian. Indeed the greatest among all those who ever wrote about the Christian religion, the copy of Lactantius Firmianus is preeminent and excels in excellence...' (Consuetudinem certe et usum illarum ab iis, quos leget, auctoribus reportabit. Sive igitur sacris libris delectabitur mulier sanitatem in litteris servatura, Augustinum sibi assumet et Hieronymum, etsi qui sunt alii non dissimiles, ut Ambrosius, ut Cyprianus Carthaginensis. Maxime vero inter omnes, qui de Christiana religione umquam scripserunt, eminet et excellit nitore quodam et copia Lactantius Firmianus...), Aretino, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, 7-8.

<sup>22</sup> 'Sive saecularibus delectetur, Tullium arripiet; quem virum, deus immortalis? Quanta facundia? Quanta copia? Quam perfectum in litteris? Quam in omni genere laudis singularem? Proximus huic Virgilius erit, decus ac deliciae litterarum nostrarum. Livius deinde et Sallustius et alii, poetaeque et scriptores, suo ordine subsequenter.'

<sup>23</sup> By 1465 the *Ars minor* had become a commonly printed text. Sweynheym and Pannartz issued the 140<sup>th</sup> edition. Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 291.

<sup>24</sup> Sixty copies of St Augustine's text were sent to Rome from Subiaco. Fuessel, *Gutenberg and the Impact of Printing*, 60.

<sup>25</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 296.

However, Howard Jones has identified an interlude in the Sweynheym and Pannartz programme before the end of 1469 when the printers issued a series of books by Neoplatonic authors including first editions of Apuleius and Aulus Gellius.<sup>26</sup> These works represent a divergence from the Bruni *cursus* of recommended texts for the aspiring humanist, and it is in this development that it is possible to find evidence of Bessarion's influence.

Although this digression was orchestrated by the bishop of Aleria, Giovanni Andrea Bussi, the principal editor for Sweynheym and Pannartz (1468-72), rather than Bessarion himself, Bussi was one of Bessarion's entourage.<sup>27</sup> Any influence that the cardinal had over the bulk of the Sweynheym and Pannartz printing programme was probably mediated through this editor. There is evidence that Bussi was closely involved with other members of Bessarion's circle such as Niccolò Perotti with whom he sparred over the quality of his editing. Perotti wrote a public letter to the humanist Francesco Guarneri condemning Bussi's edition of Pliny's *Historia naturalis*, issued in 1470.<sup>28</sup> Bessarion's secretary identified twenty-two errors in Bussi's prologue, but he had progressive solutions to suggest.<sup>29</sup> Perotti argued that a papal appointment should be established to regulate printers. This would be a scholar designated to examine and correct proofs:

The easiest arrangement is to have someone or other charged by papal authority to oversee the work [of printing classical texts], who would both prescribe to the printers regulations governing the printing of books and would appoint some moderately learned man to examine and emend individual forms before printing. Furthermore, [the appointed corrector] should take meticulous care that the primary correctors [employed by the printers] do not indulge in reckless advertisement [in their prefaces] but keep to the just measure we described shortly before [citing the preface of Campano]. The task calls for

---

<sup>26</sup> Jones, *Printing the Classical Text*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> During this period the Germans published thirty titles, of which twenty-four have Bussi's editorial signature. Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 296.

<sup>28</sup> Charlet, *Deux Pièces de la Controverse Humaniste*, 69-93.

<sup>29</sup> '...cum expositione Plyniani prohoemii duos et viginti errores correctoris satis insignes ad te misi...' Letter printed in Charlet, *Deux Pièces de la Controverse Humaniste*, 93.

intelligence, singular erudition, incredible zeal, and the highest vigilance. If this is done, we will have not only many books, but also unmutilated ones..<sup>30</sup>

Perotti also offered the services of the Bessarion Academy to take on this papal commission, indicating that the cardinal's circle was very closely involved in the scholarly aspects of the printing process.

In his book on printing in Italy, Brian Richardson draws attention to the ecclesiastical power behind the publishing process and to the considerable influence this gave the clerics:

From the early years of printing, both individual Italian states and the Church – popes themselves and local representatives such as bishops – exercised a degree of control over what was printed and what was available from booksellers. Such control had two broad aims: first, to encourage commercial and intellectual activity by protecting the interests both of those responsible for the production of books and of the customers who wished to buy them; second, to regulate the contents of books with regard particularly to religious orthodoxy, morality and, to a lesser extent, political opinion..<sup>31</sup>

It is certainly possible to find evidence of this influence in Bussi's and Bessarion's involvement with Sweynheym and Pannartz. It is argued by M. Feld that in deference to his patron, Bessarion, Bussi inserted the cardinal's private reading list into the Sweynheym and Pannartz programme, announcing his plan to make available in print the works by Aulus Gellius, Macrobius, Apuleius

---

<sup>30</sup> 'Provisio autem facillima est ut auctoritate pontificis maximi unus aut alter huic muneri preficiatur que et imprimendorum librorum legem impressoribus prescribat. Et adhibeat aliquem mediocriter peritum qui singulas quasque tabellas ante impressionem examinet atque emendet. Summo preterea studio curet ne primi isti correctores augurari aliquid temere ausint, sed modum quem paulo ante diximus servent. In his acre sit ingenium, singularis eruditio, incredibile studium, summa vigilantia. Hoc si fiet, et multos habebimus libros et integros.' Translated by John Monfasani, 'The First Call for Press Censorship', 11. Full letter printed in Charlet, *Deux Pièces de la Controverse Humaniste*, 69-93.

<sup>31</sup> Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 38-39.

and the cardinal's defence of Plato..<sup>32</sup> In his writings Bessarion also cited the same authors as worthy Platonists..<sup>33</sup> The cardinal's philosophy was elegantly represented in this programme. All his intellectual efforts – his translations, his writings and his book collection – revolved around the effort to demonstrate the relevance of the Ancients to the Christian world. Bessarion had been arguing this point since his exposure to George Gemistos Pletho. In addition the Sweynheym and Pannartz version of Apuleius conveyed the essence of Plato to Latin speakers. The cardinal's agenda to make Plato more accessible and understood in the western scholarly environment was embodied in his collection and promotion of authors such as Apuleius. The Germans also produced the first edition of the hellenist Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* which represented a fusion of Greek and Latin culture..<sup>34</sup> Gellius' twenty books of notes on grammar, geometry, philosophy and history, compiled during a winter spent in Attica, reflected the engagement of two cultures that Bessarion was also promoting in the fifteenth century. These works could be a manifesto for the intellectual life of the cardinal.

The public relationship between Cardinal Bessarion and Bussi is illustrated in the long preface to Apuleius' *Opera*, published by Sweynheym and Pannartz in 1469..<sup>35</sup> The editor used the preface as a dedication to Pope Paul II in which he bestowed lavish praise on the cardinal. It seems arguable that the prominence of his patron in this preface implies Bessarion's direct involvement with the printed edition. The preface opens with: 'Bessarion, of the Holy Rome Church, Cardinal Bishop of Sabina and Patriarch of Constantinople, most celebrated throughout the earth by the venerated name of Nicaea...'.<sup>36</sup> Bussi went on to praise Bessarion as the 'source of all divine philosophy'..<sup>37</sup> Secondly he identified Apuleius as the best source for Plato's works in Latin since the

<sup>32</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 298.

<sup>33</sup> 'Quis enim vestrum, viri Latini, non legit laudes de vita ac moribus Platonis apud M. Tullium, apud Quintilianum, apud A. Gellium, Apuleium, Macrobius reliquosque linguae Latinae auctores, quos enumerare longissimus esset?', Bessarion, *In calumniatorem platonis*, in Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, II, 443.

<sup>34</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 310.

<sup>35</sup> The preface is printed in full in Botfield, *Prefaces to the First Editions of the Greek and Roman Classics and of Sacred Scriptures*, 68-78; and in Bussi, *Prefazioni alle edizioni di Sweynheym and Pannartz*.

<sup>36</sup> 'Bessarion S[anctae], R[omanae], E[cclesiae]. Episcopus Cardinalis Sabiniensis, & Constantinopolitanus Patriarcha, Nicaeni veneranda nuncupatione terrarum ubique celeberrimus...', Quirini, *Liber singularis de optimorum scriptorum editionibus*, 211.

<sup>37</sup> Quirini, *Liber singularis de optimorum scriptorum editionibus*, 212.

philosopher's texts were not available in translation..<sup>38</sup> Apuleius was alive in the second century AD, and his work was very much influenced by the Platonic revival in cities of the Greek Mediterranean under Roman protection..<sup>39</sup> One of his major texts was *De Platone*, which summarized the philosophy of Plato..<sup>40</sup> Editing this text of the Neoplatonic Latin sophist provided Bussi with an opportunity to expound on Plato. According to Feld, he used his praise of Bessarion and Cusanus, whom he identified as Platonists, to give authority to his thesis that Plato and Christianity are compatible..<sup>41</sup> Bussi wrote that Bessarion's book on Plato revealed the philosopher's words to be divine. In fact, he continued, writing about Plato is like writing about the definition of philosophy..<sup>42</sup> According to him, Bessarion's book was the clearest and greatest volume on Plato..<sup>43</sup> Bussi's enthusiasm for Plato was juxtaposed with his praise for the cardinal's intellect..<sup>44</sup> These prefaces were a chance to show gratitude to a patron and to pave the way for future support. Bussi was also demonstrating his loyalty to the cardinal before Pope Paul II to whom the preface is addressed. The dedication was a mutually beneficial exercise. Bussi was promoting the cardinal and his ideas by associating him with the publication of books which were produced in multiple copies thus increasing the publicity he received..<sup>45</sup>

The editor's preface suggests that Bessarion featured prominently in the intellectual shaping of the Sweynheym and Pannartz printing programme. Through Bussi a case was built to promote Neoplatonic writers and to present the literary and spiritual foundations of Bessarion's own work *In calumniatorem platonis*.

<sup>38</sup> Quirini, *Liber singularis de optimorum scriptorum editionibus*, 213, 214, 216-18.

<sup>39</sup> Harrison, *Apuleius*, 3-9. To situate Apuleius in the context of Neoplatonism see Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism*, 2 vols.

<sup>40</sup> The theories he drew on from the philosopher rendered the world a place controlled by mysterious powers linked to a contemplative God. Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 315.

<sup>41</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 299.

<sup>42</sup> '...libros nuper scribere adgressus, tanta id magestate ac felicitate egit, ut convitiatorem calumniosum credi Plato ipse, divinitatis secretarius, possit, vel suggestisse, vel optasse, vel emissee....' Preface to Lucii Apuleii Opera (28.II.1469), reprinted in Bussi, *Prefazioni*.

<sup>43</sup> 'Equidem scripta a clarissimo Bessarione, tum cetera, tum pro Platone maxime...'

<sup>44</sup> 'Cuius cum ea sit, ut ipse semper praedicat, pater sanctissime, in rerum omnium maximarum usu peritia, ea in consiliis, vel gravitas, vel perspicientia, ut nihil de summis unquam rebus fiat, si Nicaeni unius desit autoritas...'

<sup>45</sup> Brian Richardson discusses the advantages to patron and client through the use of dedications in the printing medium in *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy*, 49-69.

It is arguable that Bessarion engaged with the emerging printing technology in a very personal way when his text *In calumniatorem platonis* was printed..<sup>46</sup> The primary effect of the project to print this work was to secure victory for Bessarion in the debates, which were taking place in western scholarly circles, over the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle and over the extent to which they could be reconciled with Christianity. Francesco Filelfo recognised the cardinal's contribution to the elevation of Plato's profile among Latin scholars in Rome when he wrote that,

Because of Bessarion's work Plato was now an equal in this city [Rome].<sup>47</sup>

That contribution reached its climax with the printing and distribution of Bessarion's work *In calumniatorem platonis* in 1469.

By being one of the earliest contemporary writers to have his work published in print, Bessarion was implicitly declaring his clear support for a medium whose great potential he seems to have recognized. A few years after the issuing of *In calumniatorem platonis*, works by Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481), Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) and Angelo Poliziano (1454-94) began to appear in print..<sup>48</sup> Bessarion's book was published without a specific date at some point in 1469 by the Roman based printers, Sweynheym and Pannartz..<sup>49</sup> It was originally written in Greek in 1459 and then translated by Bessarion in around 1466 as the *Liber defensionem contra obiectiones in Platonem*..<sup>50</sup> Niccolò Perotti was entrusted with the new 1469 Latin translation on account of his reputation for elegant and humanistic prose and his position as secretary to the cardinal. Commissioning his secretary to do this work reflects the evolving nature of book production in an age of printing. Brian Richardson's theory that the fixity of print motivated the author to take extra

---

<sup>46</sup> For the previously unpublished original Greek text along with the 1469 Latin edition of Book IV see volume 2 of Mohler's *Kardinal Bessarion*.

<sup>47</sup> '...quod nuper adversus calumniatorem Platonis abs aeditum in hanc Urbem à diversis studiosis delatum fuit...' Malvasia, *Compendio storico della Ven. Basilica di SS Dodeci Apostoli di Roma*, 220.

<sup>48</sup> Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 81.

<sup>49</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 301.

<sup>50</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 4.

care over grammar, punctuation and spelling could explain why the cardinal had the text retranslated by a man renowned for his command of Latin..<sup>51</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 1, the 1469 version consisted of four books: the first two dealt with the doctrines of Aristotle and Plato and their compatibility with Christianity. The third book was a rebuttal of George of Trebizond's *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*, although it ignored Trebizond's arguments against paganism and his attack on Bessarion's former tutor Pletho, which formed a substantial part of the *Comparatio*. The agenda of *In calumniatorem platonis* was concerned purely with the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle. It concluded in the fourth book with a defence of Plato's personal morality..<sup>52</sup> Book three was an addition to the 1459 original manuscript, and John Monfasani has drawn attention to the cardinal's unique attempt to reconcile Scholasticism with Platonism, using sources such as Thomas Aquinas to highlight that those traditionally considered to be Aristotelians also studied Plato and were not incompatible with the philosopher..<sup>53</sup>

The printing of *In calumniatorem platonis* was a mechanism for making a public, political statement. This text was issued as a piece of propaganda to advance the resolution of the Plato-Aristotle controversy and to refute the *Comparatio* of George of Trebizond. In 1472 Pietro Foscari, known as the Cardinal of Venice, commented on the success of Bessarion's book: 'a thousand transcripts (*Inter calumniatorem*) get around through all of Italy and outside Italy too – in Gaul, Spain and Britain.'<sup>54</sup> Bessarion was not the only intellectual to use printing to wage a campaign against a peer but he was certainly one of the first to make use of the medium as a public relations exercise. Following his example a few years later, Francesco Filelfo and his former pupil Giorgio Merula published their exchange of abusive letters..<sup>55</sup> In addition, a book was a prestigious

---

<sup>51</sup> Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 103.

<sup>52</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 309.

<sup>53</sup> Monfasani, 'A Tale of Two Books', 5.

<sup>54</sup> Mercati, *Per la cronologia della vita e degli scritti di Niccolò Perotti*, 154.

<sup>55</sup> Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 81; BMC, VII, 1136-37.

gift – especially a printed one with decorations – and printing provided the opportunity to offer these luxury objects to more than one recipient..<sup>56</sup> The publication of Bessarion's text realised the potential of this to communicate his message among those with political and financial power in Italy and beyond.

Bessarion had identified a devastating weapon in the mass and cheap production of books to wage his propaganda campaign against George of Trebizond. He won his battle through sheer numbers. Today approximately seventy libraries have copies of the 1469 edition, and several have multiples – this is an unusually high rate of survival for early incunabulae of an individual work, suggesting that many copies were issued..<sup>57</sup> There is evidence that many complimentary copies were sent out to leading humanists..<sup>58</sup> George of Trebizond's work was not promoted in the same way and subsequently became much more obscure. *In calumniatorem platonis* lived beyond Bessarion's death: in 1503 Aldus Manutius published a new edition in Venice, which was reissued by his heirs in 1516 due to its popularity..<sup>59</sup>

A further achievement of Bessarion's forays into printing was to position his writings in the western canon of Neoplatonic writers. *In calumniatorem platonis* was issued in the same year that Sweynheym and Pannartz printed the second editions of the Neoplatonic *Works* of Lactantius and St Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. That these were repeat issues indicates their relative importance in the printing programme. St Augustine was a Neoplatonic writer who promoted and interpreted the theme of monotheism in the writings of Plato and his followers..<sup>60</sup> Was it coincidence that these three works were published in the same year? Feld has suggested that a deliberate message was

---

<sup>56</sup> Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 54. For examples of luxury Aldine editions on vellum see Lowry, 'Aldus Manutius and Benedetto Bordon'.

<sup>57</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 5. For details of who owns what see *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, 1; Goff, *Incunabula in American Libraries*, and *Indice generale degli incunaboli delle biblioteche d'Italia*.

<sup>58</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 5. A collection of letters of thanks for Bessarion's gift can be found in Trapp, 'Lateinische Humanistenbriefe zu Bessarions Schrift "In Calumniatorem Platonis"', 141-65.

<sup>59</sup> Monfasani, 'A tale of two books', 5. See also the author's article 'Bessarion Latinus', 165-209, esp. 220-24 for a discussion of the Aldine edition.

<sup>60</sup> For more on St Augustine and Neoplatonism see Clark, 'The Role of Neoplatonism in St. Augustine's *Civitate Dei*'; Beierwaltes, *Agostino e il Neoplatismo cristiano*; O'Daly, *Platonism Pagan and Christian: Studies in Plotinus and Augustine*.



being promoted by publishing *In calumniatorem platonis* at the same time as *De civitate Dei*.<sup>61</sup>

Both the cardinal and the saint promoted Plato in a Christian context, and the facility of printing made it possible to situate Bessarion as an heir to St Augustine and the Fathers of the Church.

This would not be the only time that an association between Bessarion and St Augustine would be implied. Between 1502 and 1508, in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni (Confraternity of the Slavonian St George) in Venice, Vittorio Carpaccio painted the *Legend of St Augustine*.<sup>62</sup> One of the scenes depicts the saint writing at a desk in his study, surrounded by classical artefacts and scientific instruments. The facial features of Augustine were identified as those of Bessarion by the art historian Guido Perocco (Figure 68).<sup>63</sup> Perocco linked the document that the Confraternity of the Scuola di S. Giorgio had preserved recording the indulgences that Bessarion secured for them on 10 February 1464 with the fresco cycle. As an expression of the members' gratitude and posthumous veneration for their benefactor, they appear to have asked Carpaccio to depict Bessarion as St Augustine. It is not inconceivable that the bearded figure with a prominent nose in the painting was based on known portraits of Bessarion such as those in the illuminated initials of the Cesena choir books.<sup>64</sup> The nature of the objects surrounding the saint seems to suggest that this was indeed a portrait of the cardinal: in the cupboard on the left side of the back wall is a copy of the astrolabe which was designed for the cardinal by the astronomer Regiomontanus.

## Printing in the North

For the most part Bessarion patronised the German printers in Italy, but at the very end of his life he was drawn into the printing enterprise in northern Europe through his relationship with

---

<sup>61</sup> Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 319.

<sup>62</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the use of Bessarion's features in the depiction of St Augustine see Gentili, 'Carpaccio e Bessarione', 297-302; and Brown, 'Sant'Agostino nello studio di Carpaccio: un ritratto nel ritratto?', 303-18.

<sup>63</sup> Perocco, *Carpaccio nella Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni*, 31. Feld, 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism', 324-30. Patricia Fortini Brown proposed that Bessarion was the model for St Augustine in her article, 'Sant'Agostino nello studio di Carpaccio: un ritratto nel ritratto?' in the catalogue *Bessarione e l'umanesimo*.

<sup>64</sup> See chapter 5 of the present dissertation.

Guillaume Fichet (1433-80).<sup>65</sup> The two men took on the project of printing Bessarion's *Orationes*, a propaganda tract composed for Pope Paul II and for the princes of the Italian states calling for peace in Italy so that a unified resistance to the Ottomans could be launched.

Guillaume Fichet was the editor of the first Paris press.<sup>66</sup> As rector and librarian of the Sorbonne, he had a strong interest in Italian scholarship and he was instrumental in disseminating it through France.<sup>67</sup> Fichet initiated contact with Bessarion when he wrote to him to warn the cardinal that George of Trebizond's son was in Paris preaching his father's anti-Plato message and undermining Bessarion's work.<sup>68</sup>

The *Orationes* were the two speeches that Bessarion wrote to the princes of Italy after the Fall of Negroponte to the Ottomans in 1470, an event which had induced yet more despair for the cardinal. He wrote:

Perhaps I should leave this problem to the states of Italy, just as they have abandoned me. I called from the watchtower, but they turned a deaf ear. I preached, I showed them precisely the danger in which they lay! But nothing I've done – either as a monk or a cardinal – has had the slightest effect.<sup>69</sup>

By personally addressing the princes in the *Orationes*, Bessarion adopted a tone that conveys the impression of a close relationship with the Italian leaders and the pope founded on mutual

---

<sup>65</sup> A series of letters exchanged between Bessarion and Fichet have been printed in Legrand, *Cent-Dix Lettres Grécques*, 223.

<sup>66</sup> Fichet chose the texts, edited many himself, oversaw the printing process and pursued financial backing. Claudin, *The First Paris Press*, 3-4.

<sup>67</sup> In 1470 he helped produce the Italian humanist Gasparino Barzizza's *Epistolae* and *Orthographia* and in 1471 he directed the printing of Sallust's *Bellum Catalinae* and *Bellum Jugurthinum*, examples of works that were renowned in fifteenth-century Italy. Meserve, 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Paris Press', 530; Claudin, *The First Paris Press*, 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> According to Fichet, on 5 June 1470 George of Trebizond's son asked the faculty of Philosophy at the Sorbonne to formally condemn Bessarion's work, *In calumniatorem Platonis*. 'Is, pro sua in nos observantia atque illius iniquitate, acerbius nonnunquam scripsit et calumniatorem gravioribus verbis accusavit.' Letter from Bessarion to Fichet, 13 December 1470. Printed in Legrand, *Cent-Dix Lettres Grécques*, 225.

<sup>69</sup> 'Relinquamus principibus Italiae curam istam. Nam et illi reliquerunt et obaudiunt frustra tamquam e specula clamantes, predicantes, proponentes ante oculos eorum pericula...Sed ego, quod iam tot annis conatus quoad potui, nihil professione mea, nihil cardinalatus officio profui.' First version of the letter to the monk and abbot, also called Bessarion, printed in Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, 550-53. Translation Laura Bolick.

preoccupations with Latin interests. And the editor Guillaume Fichet provided the cardinal with the opportunity to develop connections in northern Europe, expanding Bessarion's influence in the West.

The *Orationes* set out the cardinal's arguments in very pragmatic terms: he analysed the Sultan's techniques and goals; assessed the political and economic pressures on his empire; and discussed whether Europe had any intention of withstanding the Muslims.

Appended to the *Orationes* was Bessarion's translation into Latin of Demosthenes' *First Olynthiac* to the Athenians. It is arguable that by this exercise Bessarion was using his Greek heritage to achieve a western goal: the promotion of a Crusade to save Christendom. In the course of presenting an acute political parallel between fourth-century BC Athens and western Christendom, Bessarion also contributed another previously inaccessible Greek text to the Latin repertoire. Between 350 and 347 BC Philip of Macedon conquered thirty-two Greek states including Olynthus in the Chalcidic peninsula..<sup>70</sup> During this period the orator Demosthenes delivered the first of three speeches calling on the Athenians to form an alliance with the Olynthians against Philip..<sup>71</sup>

It is this speech that Bessarion translated for the first time from Greek into Latin and included as part of his propaganda package delivered to the Italian princes. Bessarion's motive for including the speech was clearly to draw parallels between the Ancient Greek situation and the current one. The Byzantines, represented by the Olynthians, were facing a modern Philip of Macedon (who appropriately was Greek too) in the guise of Sultan Mehmet II. Western Christendom took the role of Athens, with Bessarion as the present day Demosthenes.

---

<sup>70</sup> Further reading on the relations between Philip of Macedon and Athens can be found in Ellis, *Philip II and Macedonian Imperialism*; Cawkwell, *Philip of Macedon*; Bradford (ed. and trans.), *Philip II of Macedon: A Life from the Ancient Sources*.

<sup>71</sup> Demosthenes, *Orationes*, volume I.

Bessarion sent the *Orationes* to Fichet on 14 December 1470 – a letter between the cardinal and Fichet, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, refers to the manuscript and records the date.<sup>72</sup> The cardinal goes on to describe his reasons for sending Fichet the *Orationes*:

I undertake to send you the *Orationes* that I have just composed on the subject of the dangers which threaten Italy and all Christians: I am sending them to you, in truth, less for you to look for purity of style in theme or the strength and superior speech, but rather to indicate to you the innumerable evils that menace the Christian world in the lifetime and fortune of her children and to engage you to reveal, to make the king and other important people, who must or could find a solution, really understand the situation..<sup>73</sup>

The agenda was to incentivize Louis XI of France into supporting a Crusade to regain Constantinople. In her study of the cardinal's tract, Margaret Meserve argues that Bessarion never intended for the *Orationes* to be printed since he expressed his 'surprise and delight' in a letter in the summer of 1471..<sup>74</sup>

Lately, when I was sincerely desirous to know whether you had received the orations which I wrote...together with the refutations of the attack against my work in praise of Plato (for I sent both of those to you a long time ago), by chance one of the secretaries of the [French] king came here and said that he had seen the orations in your hands, and that they had, thanks to your efforts, been printed and distributed to many people...I was hoping very much that you would read them; and for this reason I rejoiced at this news and gave thanks for your kindness, since you thought so highly of my trifles that you decided they deserved a wide audience..<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Lat. Mss, 4to, No. 18,591: 'Tamen mittere statuimus Orationes quasdam hoc tempore a nobis editas pro gravissimis periculis que Italie christianisque omnibus imminet...'

<sup>73</sup> '...tamen mittere statuimus orationes quasdam hoc tempore a nobis editas pro gravissimis periculis quae Italiae christianique imminet, non magis quidem ut vel sermonis puritatem vel orationis vim ac praestantiam desideretis quam ut intelligatis quanta malorum procella in christianae reipublicae capita et fortunas impendet...' Letter from Bessarion to Fichet, 13 December 1472. Printed in Legrand, *Cent-Dix Lettres Grèques*, 226.

<sup>74</sup> Meserve, 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Paris Press', 526.

<sup>75</sup> 'Quom scire cuperemus vehementer an vobis redditae fuerint et orationes a nobis editae pro christianae fidei dignitate et refutationes calumniarum in opus nostrum in philosophiae Platonis laudem conscriptum

This statement should be viewed with a certain degree of scepticism. The cardinal would have known that Fichet was closely involved in the printing trade in Paris and that works that he sent him would likely end up in print. Having succeeded in harnessing print for its propaganda value with regards to *In calumniatorem platonis*, Bessarion would have been shrewd enough to recognise the potential for disseminating his *Orationes*. It was in his interest to establish a network of northern leaders, and the mutually beneficial partnership with the Frenchman was a means to this end. His protests of surprise may have been a rhetorical expression of modesty. Guillaume Fichet was inspired by Bessarion's work and believed that print was the medium to bring about a change in the attitude of the northern princes towards a crusade campaign.

By collaborating in the printing of the *Orationes* through Fichet, Bessarion was involved in the production of a luxury item whose opulence would help muster western support for a Crusade. The book was a quarto volume of forty leaves in quires of ten. Around sixty copies are known, of which twenty survive.<sup>76</sup> Fichet himself spoke of the distribution of Bessarion's text – a feat which would have been much more difficult and expensive without printing,

Not only have I freely distributed forty-six books containing your *Orationes*, whose cause I was entrusted to defend, in all of France and Germany, but besides I took care that each of my religious brothers at the head of provincial ministries, to whom I offered an exemplaire....<sup>77</sup>

Fichet's effort to disseminate Bessarion's text extended the cardinal's sphere of influence – both politically and intellectually – in the West to include northern Europe.

---

(haec enim omnia iandiu vobis misimus), forte fortuna venit huc quidam ex numero secretariorum christianissimi Regis, qui nobis affirmavit sese vidisse orationes in vestris manibus vestra opera impressas et traditas compluribus...optabamus magnopere ut a vobis legerentur; itaque hoc nuncio et laetati sumus et humanitati vestrae agimus gracias, qui lucubrationem nostram tanti feceritis ut putaveritis dignam quae apud multos esset.' Translated in Meserve, 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Press', 538.

<sup>76</sup> Meserve, 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Paris Press', 538. A list of known manuscripts has been printed in Appendix C of Meserve's article.

<sup>77</sup> Translated from the original in Philippe, *Guillaume Fichet*, 105.

The *Orationes* were printed in Paris roman type, a large, clear, round font. The decoration scheme was scaled according to the importance of the recipient. The illuminations were done by hand and were intended to make the printed book look like a deluxe manuscript. Making an incunabula appear to be a handmade codex was a well established tradition in the first Paris press, reflecting a transitional period from manuscript to printed book that the industry was experiencing throughout the West in the fifteenth century.<sup>78</sup> The customizing touches and the choice of expensive materials elevated these books above the implications of the mass-produced printed book. A wide range of prominent patrons received copies of the *Orationes*. The lavish quality of these books is so far unexplained. There is no evidence that any of the recipients subsidised the decoration of the texts, raising the question of who was Fichet's patron and what was the objective in embellishing copies of the *Orationes*.<sup>79</sup> Fichet described the books which went to King Louis of France and Amadeus of Savoy. They are missing but it is known from the description that they were on vellum, painted with figures and images in the margins, and annotated in gold ink.<sup>80</sup> Louis' and Amadeus' copies were also embellished with gold initials illuminated in a Lombard style on a red and blue background with a white foliate decoration. This was a common style in Parisian ateliers working in the circle of Maître François.<sup>81</sup> It is evident that this printed book captured the interest of its owners. For example, Fichet described Louis' behaviour on receipt of his copy, commenting in a letter to Bessarion in 1472 that:

He [King Louis] took your book graciously and he read for an instant the short preface that I had put at the beginning of your work. Then flicking through the leaves he carefully examined the ornaments and the illuminations whose margins were filled. Then he read your small commentaries which were written in gold or various colours. All the while

---

<sup>78</sup> Meserve, 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Paris Press', 554. Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 54.

<sup>79</sup> Margaret Meserve suggests that Fichet himself commissioned and subsidised the decoration of the texts motivated by his commitment to the crusade agenda; by the opportunity to promote his connection with Bessarion; and by the potential such a project would offer him to find employment outside of Paris. 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Paris Press' 564-68. In my opinion it is questionable, however, that Fichet could have had the funds to independently support such a grand project and I wonder if Bessarion provided some monetary assistance.

<sup>80</sup> Meserve, 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Paris Press', 544. Fichet to Bessarion, 21 March 1472, printed in Legrand, *Cent-Dix Lettres Grécques*, 240.

<sup>81</sup> Meserve, 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Paris Press', 543. For the history of the atelier see Sterling, *La Peinture médiévale à Paris, 1300-1500*, and Avril and Reynaud, *Les Manuscrits à peinture en France, 1440-1520*.

reading, he addressed some brief questions to me to which I replied without hesitation. At last going back to the beginning of the book he read the distich three or four times which he saw written below his royal image: 'King, receive this gift from Bessarion who will be a fortunate augur for your undertakings abroad and domestically.'<sup>82</sup>

Coats of arms were a further personalizing touch: the Habsburg arms have been painted into Emperor Frederick's copy as have those of Himbertus Martinus, Abbot of Citeaux..<sup>83</sup> Fichet's reach was wide-ranging, although for books designated for less important recipients a second style of rubrication was used and limited to alternating red and blue chapter signs with one or two gold initials. Examples of this can be found in the books sent to Johannes Nomagianus, Prior of the Carthusians and to Jean de Bourbon, Abbot of Cluny..<sup>84</sup>

In some of the more deluxe versions, a portrait of the cardinal was included in a full page frontispiece miniature. In the copy given to King Edward IV of England, Fichet is depicted on his knees offering the book to the king, who sits under a pink baldachin (Figure 69)..<sup>85</sup> Bessarion stands behind the editor in his Basilian robes and cardinal's hat. The king and the courtiers wear the azure and greys that were typical of the Parisian miniaturist, Maître François' colour palette..<sup>86</sup> A monochrome architectural frame surmounts the scene, and the receding ground draws the viewer in and enhances the air of intimacy. This portrait of Bessarion was a visual mechanism that clearly raised the cardinal's profile among the northern potentates who received the *Orationes*.

---

<sup>82</sup> 'Gracioso quidem vultu librum excepit, legitque parumper praefaciunculam quam operi tuo praescripsi. Revolutis deinde membranibus picturas et imagines in marginibus sparsas cominus inspexit. Tum glosulas in oratione Demosthenis a te quidem positas fere singulas legit; erant enim auro varioque colore in contextu orationis interiectae. Inter legendum quaestiunculas a me quasdam rogavit, quibus praesto fuit responsum. Postremo reversus ad codicis principium, distichon ter quaterque resumpsit, quod in calce regiae imaginis scriptum repperit: Fausta futura tibi, Rex, accipe Bessarionis munera, quae prosint et foris atque domi.' Printed in Le Grand, *Cent-Dix lettres grécques*, 240. Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>83</sup> Le Grand, *Cent-Dix lettres grécques*, 274.

<sup>84</sup> Le Grand, *Cent-Dix lettres grécques*, 274.

<sup>85</sup> Now in the Vatican Library, BAV, Vat.lat.3586, fol. 4.

<sup>86</sup> The stylistic character of the illumination suggests that Maître François' workshop or an imitator had the contract. Maître François dominated the Parisian market for manuscript illumination in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. His commercial success generated numerous anonymous imitators. Eleanor Spencer was the first to identify his hand in 'L'Horloge de Sapience (Bruxelles, Bibliothèque royale, ms. IV, 111)', 277-99; and in 'Le Lectionnaire du Cardinal de Bourbon', 124-29. See also Avril and Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à peintures en France 1440-1520*.

Fichet won the support of Jean Bouchard, confessor of King Louis, and of Cardinal Elie de Bordeilles, both of whom encouraged him to press Bessarion to visit France in person to throw his weight behind the efforts to avert an internal war in the country..<sup>87</sup> Domestic peace was seen as a critical status to attain before a successful campaign could be waged against the Ottomans. In 1472 Bessarion had the opportunity to go to France when Pope Sixtus IV appointed him legate *a latere*. On the way he stopped over in Bologna where he awaited Louis' safe-conduct, which took two months to procure..<sup>88</sup> He finally arrived in Lyons where he was greeted by Guillaume Fichet. The audience with the king took place on 24 August 1472 at Mayenne, Chateau-Gontier..<sup>89</sup> It was an inauspicious time to be approaching the French monarch to ask him to commit himself and resources to a crusade since the duke of Burgundy was besieging Louis in an effort to unite Picardy with the Low Countries..<sup>90</sup> Having achieved little, Bessarion turned back to Italy. Unfortunately he was not strong enough for the journey and died at Ravenna in November 1472.

There is evidence that Bessarion's text was highly regarded as propaganda for the crusade, even after his death. Printing the *Orationes* had endowed the work with permanence and a life beyond that of the cardinal. By collaborating with a printer during his lifetime, Bessarion had a posthumous impact on western politics. The Ottoman advance continued throughout the sixteenth century with the conquest of Albania (1501); the siege of Malta (1565); and the battle of Lepanto (1571). Several editions of *Orationes* appeared during this period, and the work was translated into Italian for the duke of Ferrara, Borso d'Este. It was reprinted by Guy Marchont (Paris 1500); by Antonio

---

<sup>87</sup> Colliard, *Un ami savoyard*, 59.

<sup>88</sup> Colliard, *Un ami savoyard*, 77. During this period in Bologna Bessarion sent his reliquary of the True Cross to the Scuola della Carità in Venice.

<sup>89</sup> Colliard, *Un ami savoyard*, 78.

<sup>90</sup> Colliard, *Un ami savoyard*, 79. The French king had been forced to sign a humiliating treaty with Charles le Téméraire in 1468. For more on the political situation between France and Burgundy see Vaughan, *Charles the Bold: The Last Valois Duke of Burgundy*; Walsh, *Charles the Bold and Italy: Politics and Personnel 1467-1477*; Marti, Borchert and Keck, *Charles le Téméraire: faste et déclin de la cour de Bourgogne*.



Blado (Rome 1537); and by Francesco Prisciano (Rome 1543)..<sup>91</sup> There was a final spurt of interest between 1573 and 1593 when it was re-issued four times in both Latin and Italian..<sup>92</sup>

It is clear that Bessarion's relationship with Fichet's printing projects was one of an active patron. The Frenchman produced his own text, *Rhetorica*, while based at the Sorbonne and presented Bessarion with a copy which included a prefatory letter dedicated to the cardinal..<sup>93</sup> The book was a discourse on rhetoric and grammar, and there is a copy in Bessarion's book collection (Biblioteca Marciana, Membr. 53). This presentation copy has been printed on vellum, in 4 quarto, and contains the cardinal's *ex libris*. There is a hand-painted miniature showing Fichet kneeling as he presents work to the cardinal on a throne surmounted by a baldaquin. As with a handwritten manuscript, decoration is used to emphasise the most important part of the book: the preface, which is framed by peacocks and strawberries. In this section Guillaume Fichet set out the thesis of the text: by rehabilitating the teaching of literature and by uniting eloquence with wisdom all the sciences can recover their former splendour..<sup>94</sup> This elaborately decorated incunabula is clearly a reflection of Fichet's esteem for the cardinal and a testament to his client-patron relationship. The one miniature in the book contains a portrait of the cardinal receiving his gift, enthroned like a pope or a king (Figure 70). This is a visual statement of Bessarion's importance to Fichet, an importance which he also conveys via the text. For example, the dedication reads,

To the very excellent Father Bessarion, bishop of Sabiensis, Cardinal of Nicaea, Patriarch of Constantinople, leader in both the Greek and Latin language, from the Doctor of Theology in Paris Guillaume Fichet..<sup>95</sup>

Later, in the preface he then praises the cardinal as the 'source and master of all the Sciences'..<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Colliard, *Un ami savoyard*, 104.

<sup>92</sup> Colliard, *Un ami savoyard*, 103-05

<sup>93</sup> Colliard, *Un ami savoyard*, 62-71. The Biblioteca Marciana holds a pristine example (Membr. 53). Around a dozen copies of the book exist in world collections today.

<sup>94</sup> Colliard, *Un ami savoyard*, 64.

<sup>95</sup> 'Excellentissimo patri Bessarioni, episcopo Sabinensi, Cardinali Niceno, Patriarchae Constantinopolitano, graece lingue pariter ac latine facile principi, Guillermus Fichetus, Parisiensis theologus doctorus S.P.D.'

Translation Laura Bolick.

<sup>96</sup> Printed in Philippe, *Guillaume Fichet*, 113-15.

Fichet used the printed version of *Rhetorica* to illustrate Bessarion's role as his patron to other audiences. In the version of *Rhetorica* presented to Sixtus IV, now in the British Library, the prefatory image is a full page miniature depicting Fichet kneeling before the pope and holding out his book. The composition is identical to that in the *Orationes* presented to Edward IV, although instead of courtiers here there is a row of bishops and of cardinals. The pope sits beneath the same pink baldachin and there is a representation of Bessarion standing at his side gesturing to the author in the attitude of a patron presenting his client. The cardinal is recognisable by his grey robes of the Order of St Basil, his red hat and his long beard. Here the cardinal is being visually positioned as Fichet's patron before the pope. Including Bessarion in the illustration of this printed volume indicated that he was closely involved in the printing movement and that he was a facilitator of such projects in the eyes of powerful western patrons like the pope.

Bessarion achieved several things through his patronage of Guillaume Fichet and the Frenchman's printing initiatives. Most significantly the cardinal's voice was heard through the dissemination of his own writing, extending his influence over north European leaders and promoting his crusade agenda in an area outside Italy (where little was being achieved). In addition Bessarion's role as a patron was acknowledged visually and verbally in the presentation miniatures and texts of the copies of *Orationes* and Fichet's *Rhetorica*. And finally his skills as a linguist were endorsed both in the translation of the *First Olynthiac* and in Fichet's dedicatory preface to *Rhetorica*.

## Conclusion

There is evidence that the cardinal belonged to the contemporary camp that endorsed printing. Bessarion's project to print his work *In calumniatorem platonis* reflects that he recognised all the advantages that the technology could bring to spreading the written word, especially its potential to reach a wider audience. We can see this in his enthusiastic collecting of printed books and in the association, manifested in the effusive prefaces, with Bussi, the most prolific editor of early printed works in Rome.

Nonetheless, the question that remains unanswered is that of the scarcity of Greek texts printed in translation. There were technical obstacles to printing in the Greek language during the cardinal's lifetime but there were Latin translations available in print. Bessarion was in an ideal position to promote a campaign to make these works even more accessible to Latin scholars. Given that he appears to have grasped the benefits that printing could bring to scholarship and to his agenda to expose the Latins to ancient Greek literature, this omission suggests that the cardinal restricted his engagement with printing to projects of an exclusively western character even though there was no obstacle to publishing the many Latin translations of Greek texts that were available in the mid-fifteenth century. Concurrent efforts were being made to create Greek letters in print. Sweynheym and Pannartz produced Greek subtitles in their version of Lactantius' *Works* in 1465 at Subiaco, by cutting 29 lower case letters for the edition but omitting the subscripts and breathings. They designed a second set with a smaller body when they transferred to Rome, and they used this for their second edition of the Lactantius, printed in 1468..<sup>97</sup> Sadly for Bessarion, though, it would not be until four years after the cardinal's death in 1472 that the first book in Greek was printed by Aldus Manutius in Venice: a copy of Constantine Lascaris' *Epitome*.

---

<sup>97</sup> Jones, *Printing the Classical Text*, 144.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the cultural patronage of Cardinal Bessarion and to demonstrate that one of his aspirations was integration into his western environment. He accepted the papal primacy of the Roman Catholic Church and endeavoured throughout his Roman life to promote the papal agenda. As an effective ambassador for that institution, he was compelled to embody its principles and practices. And he was prepared, with apparently little regret, to incur the hostility of fellow Greeks due to his perceived sell out. By assessing his work as a patron it has been possible to define his cultural identity as one of conformity to an Italian and, specifically, Roman ideal.

In his burial chapel of Saints Eugenia, John the Baptist and Michael the Archangel at his titular church of SS Apostoli, Bessarion proved himself to be a creative patron. Here he chose to be interred in the manner of a Roman Catholic cardinal, surrounded by a decorative scheme that is characterised by both a western stylistic idiom and a western narrative theme. By hiring the Roman artist Antoniazio Romano to fresco scenes from the Legend of St Michael and a depiction of the angelic hierarchy, Bessarion was making a very clear statement of his Italian cultural identity. Equally westward facing was the cardinal's interaction with icons while he was in Rome. His taste for precious objects was expressed once more through a western lens when two of the most important commissions that he made in this medium: the painting of the chapel icon and the restoration of the icon he donated to S. Maria in Cosmedin, were awarded to the same Antoniazio who decorated the chapel. To choose an Italian painter over a Greek craftsman to work on items that by their very nature were Byzantine was a significant indication of the cardinal's integration into his adopted homeland.

Bessarion's library is traditionally treated as the linchpin in any argument that the cardinal had a foot in both the Byzantine and western camps. However, such a conclusion rests on the study of the Latin and Greek collections in isolation. Here an attempt has been made to examine the library as a

single cultural project and in doing so to prove that it was assembled and conceived as a collection in the style of his contemporary, western collectors. By donating this library to the Republic of Venice rather than to a Greek institution, Bessarion was establishing himself as the equivalent of the Medici in Florence or even the papacy in Rome. In the spirit of an Italian humanist patron, the cardinal demonstrated an interest in luxury books, and it was primarily the Latin collection which featured these decorated items in the style of western collectors' objects. A significant proportion of his decorated volumes were executed in an Italian stylistic vocabulary. In addition, his most impressive commission was a set of illuminated choir books, and these were intended for a western monastic Order based in Constantinople. Clearly Bessarion had no qualms about being a conduit for the promotion of western cultural traditions in Byzantium.

One of the major western developments in the fifteenth century was printing, and Bessarion seems to have been involved in this new phenomenon. The fact that Bessarion did not use his involvement with the press to develop and disseminate Greek texts in translation or to encourage experiments to print in the Greek language raises questions about the conventional assessment that the cardinal was wholly committed to a Byzantine cultural agenda. He owned a substantial number of incunabula by Latin authors; he ensured that his major works were some of the earliest contemporary texts to appear in print; and he influenced the classical Latin programme put together by the first printers in Rome, Sweynheym and Pannartz.

Cardinal Bessarion was not an exile or a refugee. He left Constantinople of his own volition thirteen years before the Fall in 1453. It is arguable that this distinction in his status as immigrant rather than asylum seeker is crucial in explaining the western nature of his cultural patronage. This was a man seeking to be fully absorbed into his adopted homeland. He made every effort to imitate Italian ecclesiastical and secular patrons and to elevate himself to their level. Although it can only be speculation, it seems unlikely that Bessarion would have considered returning to Constantinople had a Crusade succeeded in freeing the Empire from the Turkish menace. The cardinal had carved

an identity and a position for himself in the West and it is unlikely he would have ever contemplated relinquishing that status.

In the course of this investigation and as a result of its conclusion, a further rich area of exploration has been defined. This revolves around the cultural differences between the exile and the immigrant whose aspirations seem subtly opposed. As the latter, Bessarion endeavoured to put down roots in Italy and to assimilate without forgetting his Greek origins. In the field of Greek diaspora studies of the Renaissance the implications for cultural identity that such a distinction generates would seem to be a potentially fruitful avenue of future research.

## Appendix

Eugène Muntz, *Les Arts à la Cour des Papes pendant le VXème e le XVIème siècle*, II, 298-303

In nomine Domini. Amen. Anno a navitate ejusdem millesimo quadringentesimo sexagesimo quarto, indict. XII, die vero Veneris 17 mensis Februarii, pontificatus sanctissimi in Christo Patris et domini nostri D. Pii, divina providentia papae II, anno sexto, in mei notarii publici testiumque infrascriptorum, ad hoc specialiter vocatorum et rogatorum, praesentia, personaliter constitutus Reverendissimus in Christo Pater et Dominus D. Bessarion, miseratione divina episcopus Tusculanus et Romanae Ecclesiae cardinalis, patriarcha Constantinopolitanus, et apostolicae sedis legatus de latere, sanus et potens corpore et mente, volens quoque, ut asseruit, de capella perpetua, quam alias ex facultate sibi per praefatum Dominum nostrum concessa fundavit in ecclesia SS. Apostolorum de Urbe, sub vocabulo seu invocatione BB. Michaelis archangeli, Joannis Baptistae et S. Eugeniae, et circa illam quae suae voluntatis suggerit affectus, donec in corporeis membris quies viget et ratio mentem regit, salubriter providere, ordinare et disponere omnia et singula in infra seriatim insertis capitulis, sponte ac libere ordinavit, disposuit, instituit, donavit, dimisit atque fecit, prout in eisdem capitulis, alta et intelligibili voce per Dominationem Suam Reverendissimam coram me notario et testibus infrascriptis lectis, quorum tenor de verbo ad verbum talis est:

In primis instituo in capellanos capellae meae in perpetuum fundatae sub vocabulo BB. Michaelis archangeli, Joannis Baptistae ac S. Eugeniae sitae in ecclesia SS. Apostolorum de Urbe, religiosos viros fratres et conventum ordinis S. Francisci in eadem ecclesia SS. Apostolorum inhabitantes, quacunq[ue] ordinatione per nos alias super inde facta non obstante; et ordino ac dispono ut in eadem capella faciant dicti praedicti.<sup>1</sup> fratres omni die unam missam, diebus Mercurii, Veneris et Sabbati, missam pro defunctis, Dominica vero die missam currentem; die Lunae, S. Angeli; die Martis, S. Joannis Baptistae; die Jovis, S. Trinitatis, cum collecta in qualibet pro defunctis, referendo pro vivis nomen meum, pro mortuis post mortem nomen meum, Isidori et Dorothei episcoporum; item Theodori et Theodoraе, et Michaelis, ac aliorum quos in intentione mea habeo. Si tamen casu aliquo fratres praedicti a loco praedictae ecclesiae recederent, et ecclesia in pristinum statum reducta fuerit, tunc volo et ordino ut jus eligendi vel unum tantum capellanum, si reditus ipsius capellae triginta ducatos auri de camera non excesserint, vel duos, si ad sexaginta ascendant, remaneat abbati S. Pauli et priori B. Mariae de Populo monasteriorum de Urbe, qui dicant quinque missas in qualibet septimana, tres pro defunctis et duas de sanctis, videlicet de S. Archelangelo et S. Joanne Baptista, ut superius ordinatum est. Item volo et ordino ut singulis annis, decima die mensis Septembris, praedicti fratres cantent vigiliis mortuorum et missam solemnem pro defunctis meis praenominatis, vel capellani saeculares in absentia fratrum dicant totum officium legendo. Item volo ut duae vineae quas donavimus capellae praedictae pro dote sua, vendantur plus offerenti, et eisdem pecuniis emantur pro dote ejusdem capellae, in locis bonis, liberis et utilibus, responsiones vini secundum consuetudinem quae fieri solet Romae.

Concedo autem plenam facultatem et liberam vendendi vineas praedictas Rev. Patri D. Joanni Bapt. De Sabellis, apostolicae sedis protonotario, ac D. Laurentio de Venetiis, canonico Principis apostolorum de Urbe, et D. Simeoni de Pellinis, auditori nostro, subdiacono apostolico, et Petro de Rubeis de Velletro, vel majori parti eorundem, qui deponant pecunias praedictas in aliquo banco securo ubi custodiantur, nec aliquis eas tangat donec emantur responsiones praedictae. Sed ne diu capella stet sine fructu dotis suae, conentur, si possibile fuerit, simul et semel hoc facere, et vendere vineas et emere responsiones.

Item dono ex nunc in perpetuum capellae praedictae paramenta et jocalia infrascripta, videlicet: unum paramentum pro quotidiano servitio coloris albi de drapo damascino; aliud coloris bysei similiter de damascino plano, et stolas, manipula et camises; item plumalia tria, videlicet, album, brocatum de auro, et aliud pavonatium de damascino simplici cum armis meis, empta ab haereditate bon. mem. R<sup>mi</sup> Domini Card. de Columpna; et quoddam aliud nigrum de damascino, emptum ab haereditate R<sup>mi</sup> Domini Cardinalis Rutheni, bonae mem.; omnia cum pulchris frigiis; item unam planetam de damascino pavonatizio, emptam ex praedicta haereditate Domini Card. De Columpna cum frigio de foleis aureis recamatis; item calicem et patenam, duas ampullas argenteas, quas portavimus de Vienna; item de duobus novis calicibus quos fecit nunc mihi magister Simeon aurifex, unum cum patena sua; item crucem unam quae ante me ferebatur in legationibus, factam Bononiae; item thecas corporalium duas, una in qua est nomen Jesu cum perlis, et unam aliam de veluto rubeo cum corporalibus suis; item superpellicea quatuor; item de panniculis pulchris ornatis serico pro cooperiando calice duos; item tobaleas majores ad cooperiendum altare quatuor de melioribus; item tapetum unum bonum ad ponendum ante altare; item unum missale magnum emptum ab haereditate D. Cardinalis Rutheni praedicti.

<sup>1</sup> Probably 'praedicti' is correction of 'dicti'.

Item dono eidem capellae ex nunc inter vivos infrascriptas res quarum usum mihi reservo dum vivam: scilicet thuribulum quod nunc habemus, navicellam et vas pro aqua sancta cum suo aspersorio, quae nunc fecit nobis aurifex supradictus, et duo candelabra de capella nostra, quibus utimur in eadem; item pannum de veluto Alexandrino quo utimur in capella nostra, et ante altare super alium, ac breviarium magnum, emptum ab haereditate R<sup>m</sup> D. card. Rutheni piae mem., et duo bancalia de panno de ragia quae habent SS. apostolos, et alios quatuor pannos de ratgia parvos, quorum tres habent Annuntiationem, quartus vero Crucifixum; item tapetos tres; item duo candelabra magna ferrea; item quaecunque paramenta capellae nostrae, jocalia et missale unum, quibus utor domi et quae tunc inveniuntur; item unum thuribulum graecum planum cum manica; item duo ova de struzio ornata de argento; item legia duo; item faldistorium pontificale.

Item volo ut pro nunc fiat una capsula pulchra in qua deponi debeant ista omnia paramenta nostra et custodiri in sacristia praesenti, donec, Deo dante, faciemus sacristiam in loco designato per nos.

Item volo et ordino ut omnino depingatur capella eo modo prout conveni et ordinavi cum magistro; item, postquam depicta fuerit capella, primo fiat subtus tectum ligneum quod est in quadro exteriori unum supercilium pulchrum, et super trabes tecti imponantur aliquae tabulae grossae per modum pontis, ut possint transiri per longitudinem de una parte ad aliam; et claudantur bene foramina muri; et a parte orientali illa magna apertura in qua dimietatur<sup>2</sup>, apertum tantum quantum sufficiet uni homini ad intrandum; et illud etiam claudatur ostio ligneo cum clavi; item post supercilium totum illud quadrum exterius incoletur et dealbetur bene, et in facie majori, videlicet septentrionali, quae est contra altare, depingatur Dominus noster Jesus sedens in sede, cui assistant B. Virgo, S. Angelus, S. Joannes Baptista et S. Eugenia, et imago meo genuflexa ante pedes Christi, et sub me arma mea; item, istis factis volo ut adaptetur et suppleatur si quid deficit in pavimento inter cancellos; item ponantur in cancello columpnae altiores, pulchriores, et aequales, et trabs marmorea pulchra super columpnis; item parapecta marmorea ornentur melius; deinde spatium vacuum inter parapecta et trabem superiorem claudatur cratibus ferreis quae in summitate habeant folia, sicut solent fieri, et sicuti in altari S. Petri, quae attingant trabem superiorem, ita ut nullus possit illic intrare. Fiat etiam porta ferrea pulchra cum bona seratura. Supra autem trabem marmoream figantur candelabra sex de ferro pulchro, prout in capella palatii pro torticiis.

Item in altari in angulo dextrae partis intrando prope cancellos fiat sepulchrum meum in hunc modum: Fodiatur in longum et largum quantum sufficiat ad profunditatem octo pedum, et murentur omnes quatuor parietes, solario dimisso sine muro, et in altitudine duorum pedum figatur inter murum, dum fit murus, una craticula ferrea, ubi jacebit cadaver. Deinde supra craticulam ad duos pedes murus habeat incastraturam circumcirca, ut superponatur supra corpus una tabula marmorea. Deinde ad aequalitatem pavimenti capellae alia tabula marmorea, quae ex nunc possit parari et poni tali modo quod possit extrahi et poni; post haec super illam tabulam ex tribus partibus, nam quarta erit murus tribunalis, erigantur tres marmoreae tabulae, altitudinis quinque palmarum, et supra eas ponatur una pulchra marmorea tabula. In istis autem tribus tabulis erectis fiat aliquis ornatus, in quarum anteriori scribantur hae litterae: *Bessarion, episcopus Tusculanus S. Romanae Ecclesiae cardinalis, patriarcha Constantinopolitanus, sibi vivens posuit, anno salutis, etc.*, cum designatione annorum Domini tunc currentium. Hoc autem sic factum aedificium erit credentia, si quando pontifex aliquis in capella celebraverit; et ideo ponatur superius una pulchra tabula marmorea.

Item volo ut post haec completa adaptetur totum pavimentum quadri exterioris, vel marmoribus, si reperiantur, vel matonibus magis quadris secundum formam antiquorum matonum, vel aliqua materia convenienti; et similiter etiam pulpitum.

Item volo ut domus quae erat quondam Basilii de Episcopinis, scutiferi et familiaris mei, sita Romae in regione Columpnae, cum omnibus adjacentiis suis et pertinentiis, vendatur plus offerenti, et ex eisdem pecuniis emanent pro dote ejusdem capellae in locis bonis et liberis ac utilibus responsiones vini secundum consuetudinem quae fieri solet Romae. Concedo autem plenariam facultatem et liberam vendendi domum praedictam praefato D. Simeoni de Pellinis, auditori nostro et subdiacono apostolico, solum et in solidum, qui deponat pecunias praedictas in banco aliquo securo ubi custodiantur, nec aliquis eas tangat donec emanent responsiones praedictae; sicut praediximus; bene et diligenter attendat ut responsiones sint bonae et securae et in bonis, securis atque tutis consistant locis.

Quae omnia et singula praefatus Reverendissimus D. Bessarion, episcopus, cardinalis, patriarcha et legatus, omnibus melioribus modo, via, jure, causa et forma, quibus melius et efficacius potuit et debuit, fecit, ordinavit, instituit, et dimisit volens, praemissis omnibus et singulis, nunc et in perpetuum tam in iudicio quam extra et ubique locorum fidem indubiam adhiberi. Super quibus omnibus et singulis idem Reverendissimus D. Bessarion sibi a me notario publico infrascripto unum, vel plura, publicum seu publica fieri et confici voluit instrumentum et instrumenta.

<sup>2</sup> For 'dimidiatur' (indic. of *dimidio*, -are 'divide into halves') or 'dimetiatur' (subj. of *dimetior*, -iri 'measure')? The entire sentence seems to be flawed.



Acta fuerunt et sunt haec Venetiis in monasterio S. Georgii Majoris, sub anno, indictione, die, mense et pontificatu quibus supra, praesentibus ibidem Reverendissimo in Christo Patre et Domino Nicolao, Dei et apostolicae Sedis gratia archiepiscopo Sipontino, ac venerabilibus viris Dominis Eugenio Mauroceno, decretorum doctore, ac Matthaeo de Narnia, praefatis presbyteris capellanis praefati Reverendissimi D. Bessarionis, episcopi cardinalis, testibus ad praemissa vocatis speciatim atque rogatis.

Et ego Joannes de Heesboem, clericus Cameracensis dioecesis, publicus sacra imperii auctoritate notarius, quia praemissis ordinationi, dispositioni, institutioni, donationi et dimissioni, ac voluntati, omnibusque aliis, prout in dictis capitulis continetur, et singulis, dum sic ut praemittitur, per praefatum Reverendissimum D. Bessarionem episcopum cardinalem, patriarcham et legatum fierent et agerentur, una cum praenominatis testibus praesens interfui, eaque sic fieri vidi et audiui, ideo hoc praesens publicum instrumentum exinde confeci et in notam scripsi, subscripsi, publicavi, et in hanc publicam formam redegi, signoque et nomine meis solitis et consuetis signavi. In fidem et testimonium omnium et singulorum praemissorum rogatus et requisitus ego idem notarius, qui approbo supra et constat mihi de verbis rasis in ultima linea ultimi capituli praeinserti, scilicet, sed, ut praediximus, bene et diligenter attendat ut responsiones sint bonae et securae, et in bonis, securis ac tutis locis consistent, quod protestor manu propria ego idem Joannes de Heesboem, clericus et notarius.

### *Translation*

In the name of Lord. Amen. In the year 1464 after the nativity of Lord, in the twelfth indiction, on Friday 17 February, in the sixth year of the pontificate [17 February 1464] of our Most Holy Father in Christ and our Lord, Lord Pius II, Pope by divine providence, the Most Reverend Father in Christ and Lord, Lord Bessarion, bishop of Tusculum and cardinal of the Roman Church by the mercy of God, patriarch of Constantinople, and legate *de latere*<sup>3</sup> of the Apostolic See, [having] personally appeared in the presence of me, the public notary, and of the undersigned witnesses, specially called and summoned for this purpose, physically and mentally healthy and able, also wishing, as he asserted, – with regard to the perpetual chapel, which in other circumstances, with the authority granted to him by our aforementioned lord, he founded in the church of the Holy Apostles in Rome, in the name and under the invocation of the Blessed Archangel Michael and John the Baptist and Saint Eugenia, and with respect to that chapel which instigates the dispositions of his will<sup>4</sup> – to healthfully provide, order and arrange each and every thing in the chapters inserted below one after the other as long as there is vigour in the limbs of his body and reason rules his mind, he voluntarily and freely ordered, decreed, arranged, donated, left in the testament and did [all these things] as [is said] in the present chapters, read aloud and with clear voice by his Most Reverend Lordship in the presence of me, notary, and the undersigned witnesses, the tenor of which [chapters] is, word by word, as follows:

<sup>3</sup> For the definition of ‘legates *de latere*’ and ‘legates *a latere*’ see Carol M. Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome. Cardinals in the Fifteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 98-99.

<sup>4</sup> It means that Bessarion had loving feelings for the chapel.

'First of all, I give instructions to the chaplains of my chapel founded in perpetuity in the name of the Blessed Archangel Michael and John the Baptist and Saint Eugenia, located in the church of the Holy Apostles in Rome, to the friars, religious men, and the people living in the convent of the order of Saint Francis in the same church of the Holy Apostles, notwithstanding any arrangement made by us in other circumstances on that account; and I order and decree that the aforementioned friars should celebrate a mass every day in the same chapel: a mass for the deceased on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, the ordinary mass on Sunday, a mass of the Holy Angel on Monday, of St. John the Baptist on Tuesday and of the Holy Trinity on Thursday, with a collect for the deceased in every mass, by saying my name for the living, my name (after my death) and the name of the bishops Isidore and Dorotheus for the deceased; likewise [by saying the name] of Theodore and Theodora, as well as [the names] of Michael and of the others whom I have in my intention.

However, if for some reason the aforementioned friars departed from the place of the aforementioned church, and the church is restored to its former condition, then I wish and order that the abbot of the monastery of St. Paul and the prior of the monastery of the Blessed Mary of People in Rome should retain the right to appoint either only one chaplain – if the earnings of the same chapel do not exceed thirty ducats in gold of the Chamber –, or two chaplains – if they rise to sixty. They should celebrate five masses in every week, three for the deceased and two of the Saints, namely of St. Archangel and St. John the Baptist, as has been arranged above.

Likewise I wish and order that each year, on the tenth of September, the aforementioned friars should sing the vigils for the deceased and a solemn mass for the aforementioned deceased of mine, or that, in the friars' absence, the secular chaplains should say the entire office by reading it.

Likewise I wish and order that the two vines, which we donated to the aforementioned chapel as its endowment, should be sold to the person who offers the most, and with the same money, allocations of wine should be bought as endowment for the same chapel, in good, free and suitable places according to the custom which ordinarily takes place in Rome. However I grant full and unimpeded authority to sell the aforementioned vines to Reverend Father Lord Giovanni Battista Savelli, protonotary of the Apostolic See, and to Lord Lorenzo of Venice, canon of the Prince of the Apostles in Rome, and to Simeone Pellini, our

auditor and apostolic sub-deacon, and to Pietro Rubei of Velletri, or to most of them, who should deposit the aforementioned money in any safe bank where it may be guarded, and no one should touch it until the aforementioned allocations are sold. But in order that the chapel might not stand without profit of its endowment for a long time, they should try, if it is possible, to do both things, to sell the vines and buy the allocations, at one and the same time.

Likewise, henceforth and for ever, I present the aforementioned chapel with the following vestments and jewellery, namely: one white vestment, made of damask fabric, for the daily service; another yellow, similarly made of plain damask, and the stoles, maniples and albs; likewise three fur coats, namely, one white with gold brocade, and another purple made of simple damask with my coats of arms, bought with the heritage of the Most Reverend Lord Cardinal Colonna; and another one, black, made of damask, bought with the heritage of the Most Reverend Lord Cardinal [Isidore] Ruthenus, of happy memory (all [three coats] with beautiful embroideries); likewise one chasuble, made of purple damask, bought with the aforementioned heritage of Lord Cardinal Colonna with embroidered gold leaves for embellishment; likewise a chalice and a paten, two silver cruets, which we brought from Vienna; likewise, one of the two new chalices that master Simeone, the goldsmith, has now made for me, with its paten; likewise one cross, made in Bologna, which was carried in front of me during the legations; likewise two cases for corporals, on one of which there is the name of Jesus with pearls, while the other one is made of red velvet, with their corporals; likewise four surplices; likewise two of the beautiful embellished clothes made of silk for covering the chalice; likewise four of the biggest altar-clothes to cover the altar; likewise one good carpet to be put before the altar; likewise one big missal bought with the heritage of the aforementioned Lord Cardinal Ruthenus. Likewise, henceforth between the living, I present the same chapel with the following things that I reserve the right to use until I am alive, namely: the thurible that we have now, the incense-boat and the holy water vase with its aspergillum, which the aforementioned goldsmith has now made for us, and the two candelabras of our chapel that we use in the same chapel; likewise the cloth made of Alexandrian velvet that we use in our chapel and before the altar on the other [cloth], and the big breviary, bought with the heritage of the Most Reverend Lord Cardinal Ruthenus of pious memory, and two bench covers made of Arras fabric that have the Holy Apostles [displayed], and other four small Arras clothes, three of which have the Annunciation, while the fourth the Crucifix [displayed]; likewise three carpets; likewise two big iron candelabras; likewise all the vestments of our chapel as well as the jewellery and one missal that I use at the residence and that will be found at the time of my death; likewise one Greek plain thurible with the handle;

likewise two ostrich's eggs embellished with silver; likewise two lecterns; likewise the pontifical faldistorium. Likewise I wish that henceforth a beautiful case should be made, in which all these vestments of ours should be put and kept in the present sacristy until, by the gift of God, we will build a sacristy in the place designated for us.

Likewise I wish and order that the chapel should be completely painted just as I agreed and arranged with the master; likewise, after the chapel has been painted, a beautiful moulding should first be made below the wooden roof which is in the external square, and some thick planks should be placed on the beams of the roof as a bridge, so that they may be crossed lengthwise from one end to the other; and all the holes in the wall should be well repaired; and that large opening in the East side should be reduced so that it is large enough for a person to enter; and it should also be closed with a lockable wooden door; likewise after the moulding [has been made], all that external square should be plastered and whitewashed, and on the principal side, namely the northern one, against which there is the altar, our Lord Jesus should be painted sitting on his throne, around whom should be standing the Blessed Virgin, St. Michael the Archangel, St. John the Baptist and St. Eugenia, and the image of me on bended knee before Christ's feet, and my coat of arms below me; likewise, once these things have been done, I wish that, if the floor between the railing is imperfect, it should be adjusted and repaired; likewise rather high, rather beautiful and identical columns should be placed in the railing, and a beautiful marble slab should be placed on top of the columns; likewise the marble parapets should be ornamented quite well; then the void space between the parapets and the upper slab should be filled with an iron grating with foliage at the top, as it is ordinarily done and like in the altar of St. Peter, which reaches the upper slab so that nobody may enter there. A beautiful iron door should also be done, with a good lock. Six candelabras, made of beautiful iron, should also be fixed on the marble slab for the torches, like in the palatine chapel.

Likewise, entering, on the right-hand side of the altar, in the corner, near the railing, there should be my tomb made in this way: it should be dug in length and width as is sufficient to the depth of eight feet, and all the four walls should be walled up, with the top [having been] left without wall, and at the height of two feet, within the wall, while the wall is being made, an iron grid should be fixed, where my body will lie. Then, at two feet over the grid, the wall should have a groove all around, so that a marble slab should be placed over the body. Then, another marble slab (which can be prepared henceforth and be set in such a way that it can be

removed and replaced) should be placed at the same level of the floor; after these things have been done, three marble slabs should be erected on that board from the three sides (for the fourth will be the wall of the sanctuary), at the height of five palms, and one beautiful marble slab will be placed on top of them. But some embellishments should be done on these three erected slabs, on the front of which these letters should be written: "Bessarion, archbishop of Tusculum, cardinal of the Saint Roman Church, patriarch of Constantinople, erected it to himself in his lifetime, in the year of salvation etc.", with the indication of the current years of Lord. Indeed this building, made in this way, shall be the credenza<sup>5</sup>, if at any time a pope celebrates the divine service in the chapel; and therefore a beautiful marble slab should be placed on the top.

Likewise I wish that, once these things have been completed, the whole floor of the external square should be repaired, either with marble (if this may be found), or with quite square bricks according to the shape of the ancient bricks, or with any suitable material; and also the pulpit [should be repaired] in a similar manner. Likewise I wish that the house which formerly belonged to Basilio Episcopini, my shield bearer and friend, situated in Rome in the territory of Colonna, with all its adjacencies and pertinences, should be sold to the person who offers the most, and with this money, allocations of wine should be bought as endowment for the same chapel, in good, free and suitable places, according to the custom that ordinarily takes place in Rome. But I grant the full and unimpeded authority to sell the aforementioned house, only and entirely, to the aforementioned Lord Simeone Pellini, our auditor and apostolic sub-deacon, who should put the aforementioned money in some safe bank where it may be kept and no one should touch it until the aforementioned allocations are bought, as we said before; opportunely and carefully, he should take care that the allocations are good and safe and stand in good, safe and secure places.'

The aforesaid Most Reverend Lord Bessarion, bishop, cardinal, patriarch and legate did, ordered, arranged and left all these things in his testament in the best manner, way, law, condition and form in which he better and more effectively could and should, wishing that, with each and every thing having been mentioned before, his steadfast faith were applied now and for ever, as much in court as outside of it and in whatever place. Concerning all these things, the same Most Reverend Lord Bessarion wished that a public instrument or more public instruments should be made and prepared for him by me, the undersigned public notary. These things were and are done in Venice, in the monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore, in the aforementioned

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Credence table for sacramental vessels'

year, indiction, day, month and pontificate, in the presence of the Most Reverend Father in Christ and Lord Nicolaus, the archbishop of Siponto for the sake of God and the Apostolic See, as well as of the venerable men Lord Eugenio Mauroceno, doctor in decretals, and Matteo of Narni, the aforementioned priest-chaplains of the aforementioned Most Reverend Lord, bishop and cardinal Bessarion, and the witnessess specially called and summoned for the aforementioned purposes.

And I, Johannes de Heesboem, cleric of the diocese of Cambrai, public notary for the sacred authority of the empire, since – with the regulation, decree, arrangement, donation and bequest, as well as wish and each and every thing having been mentioned above, as is contained in the mentioned chapters, as long as these things are done and executed by the aforementioned Most Reverend Lord Bessarion, bishop, cardinal, patriarch and legate in the same way as is stated before – I was present together with the aforementioned witnesses, and I saw and heard these things being made in this way, therefore being present, I thence produced this public act and I annotated, signed and made it public, and I wrote in this public form, and signed it with my usual and habitual signature and name. In faith and testimony of each and every thing mentioned above, I myself public notary, summoned and asked, who approve the things above and it is agreed by me about the words deleted in the last line of the last chapter inserted above, namely ‘but, as we have said before, opportunely and carefully, he should take care that the allocations are good and safe and stand in good, safe and secure places’, which I myself, Johannes de Heesboem, clerk and public notary, publicly testify by my own hand.

Translated by Matteo Favaretto [October 2013]

# List of Original Sources

## **Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana**

Bessarione 1, Graduale

Bessarione 2, Graduale

Bessarione 3, Antifonario

Bessarione 4, Antifonario

Bessarione 5, Graduale

Bessarione 6, Antifonario

Bessarione 7, Antifonario

Bessarione 8, Antifonario

## **Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana**

Vat.Barb.lat.585, Bessarion's Missal

## **Venice, Biblioteca Marciana**

Marc.Lat.z.12, Biblorum Vocabulista

Marc.Lat. z.14, Donation of Bessarion's Library to the Venetian Republic

Marc.Lat.z.38, Origen, Periarchon, book 3, Latin verses to Ruffinus, presbyter

Marc.Lat.z.40, L. Caeli Lactantii Firmiani, Divinarum Institutionum adversus gentes libri VII ad COnstantinum Imperatorem

Marc.Lat.z.45, St Basil the Great to Amphilochius against the Apologia of the Impious Eunomius Antirreticus, rendered in Latin by George of Trebizond

Marc.Lat.z.50, Letters of St Jerome

Marc.Lat.z.57, St Augustine, Ennarationes on the Psalms

Marc.Lat.z.62, Augustine, De Trinitate

Marc.Lat.z.120, Aquinas, Quaestiones: De virtutibus/ De Unione Verbi Incarnati/ De Malo; De Spiritualibus creaturis/ De Anima

Marc.Lat.z.135, Bessarion, Declaratio/Dogmatic speeches given to the Greeks at the Synod of Florence / On the procession of the Holy Spirit/Against the Rationes of Gregorius the former patriarch /Against the arguments of Marcel Ephesus / On the Catholic faith/ On the sacred Eucharist

Marc.Lat.z.174, Gloss by Barthomaei, Liber canonum/ Codex decretorum/ Volumen decretorum. In addition Laurentii Hispani/ Laws of the doctors Ioannis Andree and Bernardi.

Marc.Lat.z.339, Ioannis Sophianus, descriptions and pictures of war machines from antiquity. De re militaria et instrumentis bellicis

Marc.Lat.z.384, Eusebius Pamphili, Chronicon

Marc.Lat.z.376, Valerius Maximus, dictorum ac factorum

Marc.Lat.z.248, Cicero, Orationes.

Marc.Lat.z.430, Cicero Orationes

Marc.Lat.z.444, Ovid's Works copied by Bessarion

Marc.Lat.z.462, Scriptores rei rustica/ L. Iunii Moderati Collumellae, De re rustica/ M. Terentius Varronis, Rerum Rusticarum/ M. Porcii Catonis, de agricultura, ad Catonem filium, Book 1

Marc.Gr.z.5, Bible

Marc.Gr.z.8, Quattuor Evangelia

Marc.Gr.z.12, Evangeliary

Marc.Gr.z.142, S. Dionysii the Areopagitae/De caelesti hierarchia/De Divinis nominibus./De mystica theologia./De ecclesiastica hierarchia./Epistolae/

Marc.Gr.z.143, S. Dionysii Areopagitae Opera ut in Codice proxime praecedenti, cuius iisdem scholiis, quae S Maximo tribuuntur in editis

Marc.Gr.z.148,, Thomas Aquinas, Contra Gentes libri/Demetrio Cydone/Prima pars Summa Theologiae/Epitome primae secundae parta Summa Theologiae

Marc.Gr.z.184, Plato, Opera

Marc.Gr.z.187, Plato's Dialogues: Republic, Timaeus, Critias, Minos, De Legibus, Epistolae

Marc.Gr.z.191, Lycii Proclus, commentary on Plato's Parmenides, book 7/Ammonii Hermiae, commentary on Plato's Phaedra, book 3

Marc.Gr.z.219, Aristotle's Physica

Marc.Gr.z.243, Iamblichus Chalcidensis, On the life of Pythagoras, first book/ Horationes ad Philosophiam, Or commentary on Pythagoras, second book/On Mathematics/ commentary on arithmetic institutions of Nicomachus

Marc.Gr.z.248, Plutarch, Opera varia

Marc.Gr.z.263, Alexander Heronis, Spiritualia/ Trismegisti Mercurius, Poemander / Aesclepius, Definitions/ Porphyrii, Sententiae ad intelligibilia/ Theophrastus/ Priscianus/ Theophrastus/ Aristotle On Physiognomies/ Damascus/ Anonymous, exposition on Aristotle

Marc.Gr.z.337, Eusebius Pamphili, Ecclesiasticae Historiae libri X/ Theodreti, Cyri Episcopi Historiae Ecclesiasticae libri V/ Excerpta ex Ecclesiastica Historia Theodori Lectoris, libris II/ Hermiae Sozomeni, Historia Ecclesiasticae libri IX/ Socratis Scholastici, Historia Ecclesiasticae libri VII/ Evagrii, Epiphaniensis Historiae Ecclesiasticae libri VI/ Epitome ex XII libris Historiae / Ecclesiasticae Philostorgii, ex voce Photii Patriarchae

Marc.Gr.z.384, Plutarch, Vitae

Marc.Gr.z.454, Homer A

Marc.Gr.z.461, Eustazio Thessalonicis, Commentary on the Iliad in Nine Books

Marc.Gr.z.495, St John Chrysostom in Evangelia Johannis & Matthaei



## Bibliography

- Alexander, J.J.G.**, 'Patrons, Libraries and Illuminators in the Italian Renaissance', *Studies in Italian Manuscript Illumination*, ed. J.J.G. Alexander, London 2002.
- , *Federico da Montefeltro and his Library*, Milan 2007.
- Andaloro, Maria**, 'L'Icona della Vergine "Salus Populi Romani"', *La Basilica Romana di Santa Maria Maggiore*, ed. Carlo Pietrangeli, Florence 1987, 124-27.
- Antoniutti, Arianna** (ed), *Pio II e Sant'Andrea Apostolo: Le ragioni della devozione*, Rome 2004.
- Antonovics, Anthony V.**, 'The Library of Cardinal Domenico Capranica', in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honour of Paul Kristeller*, ed. C.H. Clough, Manchester and New York 1976, 141-59.
- Aretino, Leonardo Bruni**, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe*, ed. Hans Brown, Leipzig 1928.
- Armstrong, Lillian**, *Miniature Painters and Classical Imagery: The Master of the Putti and his Venetian Workshop*, London 1982.
- Arnold, John Charles**, 'Arcadia Becomes Jerusalem: Angelic Caverns and Shrine Conversion at Monte Gargano', *Speculum* 75 (2000), 566-88.
- D'Ascia, Luca**, *Il Corano e la tiara: L'epistola a Maometto II di Enea Silvio Piccolomini (papa Pio II)*, Bologna 2001.
- Avril, Francois, and Nicole Reynaud**, *Les Manuscrits à peinture en France, 1440-1520*, Paris 1993.
- Bacchelli, Franco**, 'La legazione del cardinale Bessarione (1450-1455)', *Bessarione e l'umanesimo*, Naples 1994, 137-47.
- Baiardi, Giorgio Cerboni, Giorgio Chittolini and Piero Floriani**, *Federico di Montefeltro*, Rome 1986, 3 vols.
- Baert, Barbara**, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, Leiden and Boston 2004.
- Bandini, Aloysius**, *Commentarius*, reprinted in Migne, J.-P., (ed), *Patrologiae Graecae: Cursus Completus*, 161, Paris 1866, appendix.
- Barbier, Frédéric**, 'La ville, le prince et la bibliothèque: Espaces, savoirs et pouvoirs dans l'Europe de la Renaissance', *Le Pouvoir des Livres à la Renaissance*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles, Paris 1998, 9-22.
- Beierwaltes, Werner**, *Agostino e il Neoplatismo cristiano*, Milan 1995.
- Belli d'Elia, Pina**, 'Il toro, la montagna, il vescovo. Considerazioni su un tema iconografico', *Culto e Insediamenti Micaelici nell'Italia Meridionale fra Tarda Antichità e Medioevo*, ed C. Carletti and G. Otranto, Monte Sant'Angelo, 1994, 576-618.

**Belting, Hans**, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Chicago and London, 1994.

**Bentivoglio, Simonetta and Enzo**, 'Le Pitture di Lorenzo da Viterbo nella Cappella Mazzatosta a Viterbo', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches im Florenz*, 17 (1973), 87-104.

**Bertelli, Carlo**, 'Icône di Roma', *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes*, 1 (1967), 100-06.

**Bertola, Maria**, 'Incunaboli esistenti nella Biblioteca Vaticana durante il secolo XV', *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, 6 (1946), 398-408.

**Bertoni, Giulio**, *La Biblioteca Estense e la cultura ferrarese ai tempi del Duca Ercole I (1471-1505)*, Turin 1903.

**Bessarion, Cardinal Iohannes**, *Oratio dogmatica de Unione*, ed. Emmanuel Candal, Rome 1958.

----, *Encyclica ad Graecos*, reprinted in Migne, J.-P. (ed), *Patrologiae Graecae: Cursus Completus*, 161, Paris 1866, 453B.

**Bianca, Concetta**, 'La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione', *Scrittura, Biblioteche e Stampa a Roma nel Quattrocento*, Vatican City 1980, 103-65.

----, 'La biblioteca romana di Niccolò Cusano', *Scrittura, Biblioteche e Stampa a Roma nel Quattrocento*, Vatican City 1982, 669-708.

----, 'Auctoritas et Veritas: il Filelfo e le dispute tra platonici e aristotelici', *Francesco Filelfo nel quinto centenario della morte*, Atti del convegno di studi maceratesi, Padua 1986, 207-47.

----, 'L'Abbazia di Grottaferrata e il Cardinale Bessarione', *Fatti, Patrimoni e Uomini Intorno All'Abbazia di San Nilo Nel Medioevo*, Atti del I Colloquio internazionale, Grottaferrata, 26-28 April 1985, Grottaferrata 1988, 135-52.

----, *Da Bisanzio a Roma. Studi sul cardinale Bessarione*, Rome 1999.

**Bibliotheca Sanctorum**, vol. 9, Rome 1967, col. 424-29.

**Bignami Odier, Jeanne**, *La Bibliothèque Vaticane de Sixte IV à Pie XI: Recherches sur l'histoire des collections de manuscrits*, Vatican City 1973.

**Bilderback, Loy**, 'Eugene IV and the First Dissolution of the Council of Basel', *Church History*, 36 (1967): 243-53.

**Black, Anthony**, *Council and Commune: The Conciliar Movement and the Fifteenth-Century Heritage*, London 1979.

**Blum, Paul Richard**, *George Gemistos Plethon; George of Trebizond; Cardinal Bessarion: The Controversy between the Platonists and Aristotelians in the Fifteenth Century in Philosophers of the Renaissance*, Washington 2010.

**Bond, H. Lawrence**, 'The "Icon" and the "Iconic Text" in Nicholas of Cusa's *De Visione Dei* I-XVII', *Nicholas of Cusa and His Age: Intellect and Spirituality*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto, Leiden, Boston, Cologne 2002, 177-97.

- Boskovits, Miklos**, *The Mosaics of the Baptistery of Florence*, Milan 2007.
- Botfield, Beriah**, *Prefaces to the First Editions of the Greek and Roman Classics and of Sacred Scriptures*, ed. Beriah Botfield, London 1861.
- Bouet, Pierre and Olivier Desbordes (eds)**, *Chroniques latines du Mont Saint-Michel (IX-XIIème siècle)*, Caen 2009.
- Bracciolini, Poggio**, *Lettere*, ed. Helene Harth, Florence 1984-87.
- Bradford, Alfred S.**, (ed. and trans.), *Philip II of Macedon: A Life from the Ancient Sources*, Praeger 1992.
- Braschio, Johannes Baptista**, *Memoriae Caesenates Sacrae et Profanae*, Rome 1738.
- Bresc, Henri**, *Livre et société en Sicile (1299-1499)*, Palermo 1971.
- Brooks, Sarah**, 'Commemoration of the Dead: Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration', PhD diss., IFA 2002.
- Brown, Patricia Fortini**, 'Sant'Agostino nello studio di Carpaccio: un ritratto nel ritratto?' *Bessarione e l'umanesimo*, Naples 1994, 303-18.
- Brown, Peter**, *The Cult of Saints*, Chicago and London 1981.
- Bruderer Eichberg, Barbara**, 'Les neufs choeurs angéliques: Origine et evolution du thème dans l'art du Moyen Age', PhD diss., University of Geneva, 1998.
- Bruni, Leonardo**, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe*, Hans Baron, Leipzig 1928.
- Buchowiecki, Walther**, *Handbuch der Kirchen Roms: Der Römische Sakralbau in Geschichte und Kunst von der Altchristlichen zeit bis zur gegenwart*, vol. 1, Vienna 1967.
- Buchthal, Hugo**, 'Illuminations from an Early Palaeologan Scriptorium', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik, Festschrift für Otto Demus zum 70 Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Hunger and Marcell Restle, 1972, 48-49.
- , 'Toward a History of Palaeologan Illumination', *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art*, ed. K. Weitzmann, W.C. Loerke, E. Kitzinger, Hugo Buchthal, 1975, 143-77.
- Burckhardt, Jacob**, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, 2 vols., New York 1958.
- Burke-Young, Francis A.**, *Passing the Keys: Modern Cardinal, Conclaves, and the Election of the Next Pope*, Lanham 1999.
- Busiri-Vici, Clemente**, 'Un ritrovamento eccezionale relativo all'antica basilica dei SS. Apostoli in Roma', *Fede e Arte: Rivista internazionale di arte sacra*, 8 (1960), 70-83.
- Bussi, Giovanni Andrea**, *Prefazioni alle edizioni di Sweynheym e Pannartz Prototipografi romani*, ed. Massimo Miglio, Milan 1978.

- Caciorgna**, Maria Theresa (ed), *Santa Maria di Grottaferrata e il Cardinale Bessarione: Fonte e Studi sulla Prima Commenda*, Rome 2005.
- Cadei**, A., *Belbello, miniatore lombardo: artisti del libro alla corte dei Visconti*, Rome 1976.
- , *Studi di miniature lombarda: Giovanni de Grassi, Belbello da Pavia*, Rome 1984.
- Campbell**, Caroline and Alan Chong, *Bellini and the East*, London 2005.
- Campbell**, Caroline, 'Cardinal Bessarion and Two Members of the Scuola della Carità in Prayer with the Bessarion Reliquary', *National Gallery Review*, April 2001-March 2002, 24-25.
- Candal**, Emmanuel, 'Bessarion Nicaenus in Concilio Florentino', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 6 (1940), 417-46.
- Canova**, Giordana Mariani, 'Una illustre serie liturgica ricostruita: I corali del Bessarione già all'Annunziata di Cesena', *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, 11 (1977), 9-145.
- , *Miniature dell'Italia settentrionale nella Fondazione Giorgio Cini*, Venice 1978.
- Carosi**, Gabriele Paolo, *Subiaco e l'introduzione della stampa in Italia*, Milan 1972.
- Cattapan**, Mario, 'Nuovi Elenchi e Documenti dei Pittori in Creta dal 1300 al 1500', *Thesaurismata*, 9 (1972), 202-35.
- Cavallaro**, Anna, 'Antoniazio Romano e le confraternité del quattrocento a Roma', *Ricerche per la storia religiosa di Roma*, 5 (1984), 335-65.
- , *Antoniazio Romano e gli Antoniazzeschi*, Udine 1992.
- , 'Il rinnovato culto delle icone nella Roma del Quattrocento', *L'Arte di Bisanzio e l'Italia al tempo dei Palaeologi, 1261-1453*, ed. Antoni Iacobini and Mauro della Valle, Rome 1999, 285-99.
- Cawkwell**, George, *Philip of Macedon*, London 1978.
- Cecchini**, Giovanni, 'Evoluzione architettonico-strutturale della Biblioteca pubblica in Italia dal secolo XV a XVII', *Accademie e Biblioteche d'Italia*, 35 (1967), 27-47.
- Chacon**, *Vitæ et res gestæ summorum pontificum et S.R.E. cardinalium ad Ciacconii exemplum continuatæ, quibus accedit appendix qua vitas cardinalium perficit à Guarnaccio non absolutas*, vol. 2, Rome 1787.
- Chambers**, David S., 'The Earlier "Academies" in Italy', *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. David S. Chambers and Francois Quiviger, London 1995, I:1-14.
- Charlet**, J.L., *Deux pièces de la controverse humaniste sur Plinie: N. Perotti, Lettre à Guarnieri. C. Vitelli, Lettre à Partenio di Salò*, Sassoferrato 2003.
- Chastel**, André, 'La glorification humaniste dans les monuments funéraires de la Renaissance', *Umanesimo e Scienza Politica: Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Humanistici*, Rome - Florence 1949, ed. Enrico Castelli, 1951, 477-85.

**Chatzidakis, Nano** (ed), *Da Candia a Venezia: Icone Greche in Italia XV-XVI Secolo*, Venice and Athens 1993.

**Christianson, Gerald**, 'Annates and Reform at the Council of Basel', *Reform and Renewal in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Thomas Izbicki and Christopher Bellito, Leiden 1999, 198-207.

**Clark, M.T.**, 'The Role of Neoplatonism in St Augustine's *Civitate Dei*', *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honour of A. H. Armstrong*, ed. H. Blumenthal and R.A. Marks, London 1981, 160-70.

**Claudin, Anatole**, *The First Paris Press: An Account of the Books Printed for G. Fichet and J. Heynlin in the Sorbonne, 1470-1472*, London 1878.

**Clough, Cecil H.**, 'Bessarion and Greek at the Court of Urbino', *Manuscripta*, 8 (1964), 160-71.

**Clough, Cecil, H.**, 'The Library of the Dukes of Urbino', *Librarium*, 9 (1966), 101-04.

**Coccia, Antonio**, 'Il Cardinale Bessarione ed il suo sepolcro nella basilica dei SS. Apostoli', *Almanacco dei Bibliotecari Italiani*, 1972, 40-48.

----, 'Vita e Opere del Bessarione', *Miscellanea Francesca*, 73 (1973), 265-93.

**Collett, Barry**, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation: The Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua*, Oxford 1985.

**Colliard, L.-A.**, *Un ami savoyard du cardinal Bessarion: Gullaume Fichet, Ancien recteur de l'Université de Paris*, Paris 2004.

**Coluccia, Giuseppe**, *Basilio Bessarione: Lo spirit Greco e l'Occidente*, Florence 2009.

**Connell, Susan**, 'Books and their Owners in Venice: 1345-1480', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 35 (1972), 163-86.

**Corvisieri, Costantino**, 'Antonazo Aquilio Romano: Pittore del secolo XV', *Il Buonarroti*, June 1869, 129-36; 157-67.

**Creighton, Mandell**, *Historical Essays and Reviews*, London and New York 1902.

**Crouzet-Pavan, Elisabeth**, *Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du moyen-âge*, II, Rome 1992.

**Crowder, C.M.D.**, *Unity, Heresy and Reform, 1378-1460: The Conciliar Response to the Great Schism*, New York 1977.

**Cutler, Anthony**, 'From Loot to Scholarship: Changing Modes in the Italian Response to Byzantine Artifacts, ca. 1200-1750', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 49 (1995), 237-67.

**Damerini, Gino**, *L'Isola e il cenobio di San Giorgio Maggiore*, Venice 1956.

**Danbury, Elizabeth**, 'The Decoration and Illumination of Royal Charters in England, 1250-1509: An Introduction', *England and Her Neighbours, 1066-1453: Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais*, ed. Michael Jones and Malcolm Vale, London 1989, 157-79.

Davies, Martin, 'Juan de Carvajal and Early Printing: The 42-line Bible and the Sweynheym and Pannartz Aquinas', *The Library*, series 6, vol. 18, no. 3(1996), 193-215.

De Benedictis, Angela, *Repubblica per contratto: Bologna: una città europea nello Stato della Chiesa*, Bologna 1995.

De la Mare, Albinia, 'The Library of Francesco Sassetti', in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honour of Paul Kristeller*, ed. C.H. Clough, Manchester and New York 1976, 160-201.

De Luca, Silvia, 'La cappella Velluti-Zati in Santa Croce fra giottismo e arcaismi', *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte*, 102 (2010), 25-36.

De Margerie, B., 'Vers une relecture du concile de Florence grace à la reconsidération de l'Écriture et des Pères grecs et latins', *Revue Thomiste*, 94 (1986), 31-81.

De Price, Derek, 'The First Scientific Instrument of the Renaissance', *Physis*, I (1959), 26-30.

Demosthenes, *The Orations of Demosthenes*, ed. and trans. Charles Rann Kennedy, vol. 1, London 1897.

Dennis, George T., 'Death in Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55 (2001), 1-7.

Derbes, Anne and Amy Neff, 'Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere', *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, ed. Helen C. Evans, New York 2004, 449-88.

Devoti, Luigi, *L'Abbazia di Santa Maria di Grottaferrata dalla fine del medioevo al secolo XX*, Rome 1997.

Dolcini, Carlo, 'La storia religiosa', *Storia di Cesena*, ed. Augusto Vasina, Rimini 1985, II:93-127.

Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks, An Annotated Translation of 'Historia Turco-Byzantina'*, ed. Harry J. Magoulias, Detroit 1975.

Duchesne, ed., *Liber Pontificalis*, second edition, Vatican City 1955.

Duits, Rembrandt, "'Una Icona Pulcra". The Byzantine Icons of Cardinal Pietro Barbo', *Mantova e il Rinascimento italiano: studi in onore di David S. Chambers*, ed. Philippa Jackson and Guido Rebecchini, Mantua 2011, 127-42.

----, 'Byzantine Icons in the Medici Collection', *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe*, ed. Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Rembrandt Duits, Farnham 2013, 157-88.

Dunston, A.J., 'Pope Paul II and the Humanists', *The Journal of Religious History*, 7, no. 4 (1973), 287-306.

Dvornik, Francis, *The Idea of Apolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of the Apostle Andrew*, Cambridge, Mass. 1958.

----, *Byzance et la primauté romaine*, Paris 1964.

Ellis, J.R., *Philip II and Macedonian Imperialism*, London 1976.

**Esposito Aliano**, Anna, 'Testamento e inventari per la ricostruzione della biblioteca del Cardinale Guglielmo d'Estouteville', *Scrittura, Biblioteche e Stampa a Roma nel Quattrocento*, Atti del seminario, 1-2 July 1979, Vatican City 1980, 309-42.

**Eubel**, Conradum, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi : sive Summorum pontificum, S.R.E. cardinalium, ecclesiarum antistitum series ab anno 1198 usque ad annum 1431 perducta e documentis tabularii praesertim Vaticani collecta, digesta edita*, 2 vols, Regensburg 1898-.

**Evans**, Helen C., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, New York 2004.

**Everett**, Herbert, 'Antoniazio Romano', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 11, no. 3 (July- September, 1907), 279-306.

**Everett**, Nicholas, 'The *Liber de Apparitione S. Michaelis in Monte Gargano* and the Hagiography of Dispossession', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 120 (2002), 364-91.

**Every**, George, *Misunderstandings between East and West*, London 1965.

**Fantaguzzi**, Giuliano, *Caos: Cronache Cesenati del Sec. XV*, ed. Dino Bazzochi, Cesena 1915.

**Farenga**, Paola, 'Il sistema delle dediche nella prima editoria romana del Quattrocento', *Il libro a corte*, ed. Quondam Amadeo, 1994, 57-87.

**Fedalto**, Giorgio, *Ricerche storiche sulla posizione giuridica ed ecclesiastica dei greci a Venezia nei secoli XV e XVI*, Florence 1966.

**Feld**, M.D., 'Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism: Renaissance Humanism and Two Early Printers' Choice of Texts', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 30, no. 3 (1982), 282-335.

**Fiaccadori**, Gianfranco, and Paolo Eleuteri, *I Greci in Occidente: La Tradizione filosofica, scientifica e letteraria dalle raccolte della Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana*, Venice 1966.

**Ficino**, Marsilio, *Opera omnia. Con una lettera introduttiva di Paul Oskar Kristeller e una premessa di Mario Sancipriano*, Basel 1576 (facsimile, Torino 1962).

**Fink**, K.A., 'Eugene IV and the Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence', *Handbook of Church History*, ed. H. Jedin, vol. 4, New York 1970, 473-87.

**Fogolari**, Gino, 'La teca di Bessarione e la croce di San Teodoro di Venezia', *Dedalo* 3 (1922), 139-54.

----, 'La Chiesa di Santa Maria della Carità di Venezia', *Archivio Veneto-Tridentino*, 5 (1924), 57-119.

**Franceschini**, Adriano, 'Codici e libro a stampa nella società e nelle biblioteche private ferraresi del secolo XV', *La Bibliofilia*, 85 (1983), 321-39.

**Franceschini**, Gino, 'Violante Montefeltro Malatesti Signora di Cesena', *Studi Romagnoli*, I (1950), 133-90.

**Frantz**, Alison, 'Byzantine Illuminated Ornament: A Study in Chronology', *Art Bulletin*, 16 (1934), 43-76.

- Freedberg, David**, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago 1989.
- Freuler, Gaudenz**, *Biagio di Goro Ghezzi a Paganico: L'Affresco nell'abside della Chiesa di S. Michele*, Milan 1986.
- Frolow, A.**, *La Relique de la Vraie Croix: Recherches sur le développement d'un culte*, Paris 1961.
- Fuessel, Stephan**, *Gutenberg and the Impact of Printing*, trans. Douglas Martin, Aldershot 1999.
- Furlan, Italo**, *Codici greci illustrati della Bibliotheca marciana*, Padua 1988.
- Gardner, Julian**, 'The Early Decoration of Santa Croce in Florence', *Burlington Magazine*, 113 (1971), 391-93.
- Garin, E.**, 'Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele nel secolo XV', *Atti dell'Accademia Fiorentina di scienze morali 'La Colombaria'*, 8, Florence 1950, 55-104.
- Gaspere de Verona** and Michele Canensi, *Le vite di Paolo II*, ed. Giuseppe Zippel, vol. 3, Città di Castello 1904.
- Gatti, Isidoro Liberale**, 'Il Palazzo della Rovere ed il Convento dei Santi Apostoli in Roma attraverso i Secoli', *Miscellanea Francescana*, 79 (1979), 392-440.
- Geanakoplos, Deno J.**, *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Studies in Ecclesiastical Church History*, Oxford 1966.
- , 'An Orthodox View of the Councils of Basel and Florence', *Constantinople and the West: Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches*, Wisconsin 1989, 255-78.
- Gentili, Augusto**, 'Carpaccio e Bessarione', *Bessarione e l'umanesimo*, Naples 1994, 297-302.
- Gersh, Stephen**, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 vols, Notre Dame 1986.
- Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, 1, Leipzig-Stuttgart-Berlin, 1925-.
- Ghirardacci, Cherubino**, *Della historia di Bologna*, 4 vols, Bologna 1596-1657.
- Ghisalberti, Alberto M.**, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Rome 1960-.
- Giannini, Romano**, 'Vita della Theotocos di Grottaferrata: una luminosa presenza plurisecolare', *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata*, 42 (1988), 3-47.
- Gill, Joseph**, *Council of Florence*, Cambridge 1959.
- , *Eugenius IV: Pope of Christian Union*, London 1961.
- , *Personalities of the Council of Florence and Other Essays*, Oxford 1964.



- , 'East and West in the Time of Bessarion', *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, 5 (1968), 1-27.
- , 'The Sincerity of Bessarion the Unionist', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 26 (1975), 377-92.
- Gill, Meredith, "'Where the Danger was Greatest": A Gallic Legacy in Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 59 (4) (1996), 498-551.
- Ginzburg, Carlo, *The Enigma of Piero: Piero della Francesca: the Baptism, the Arezzo cycle, the Flagellation*, London 1985.
- Giovenale, G.B., *La basilica di S. Maria in Cosmedin*, Rome 1927.
- Gisolfi, Diana, and Staale Sinding-Larsen, *The Rule, the Bible, and the Council: The Library of the Benedictine Abbey at Praglia*, Washington 1998.
- Glaser, Tamas, 'The Remnants of the Hellenes: Problems of Greek Identity after the Fall of Constantinople', *Der Beitrag der Byzantinischen Gelehrten zur Abendlaendischen Renaissance des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Evangelos Konstantinou, Frankfurt 2006, 199-210.
- Goff, Frederick, *Incunabula in American Libraries: A Third Census of Fifteenth-Century Books Recorded in North American Collections*, New York 1964.
- , *Indice generale degli incunaboli delle biblioteche d'Italia*, ed. T. M. Guarnaschelli, E Valenziani and E. Cerulli, 4 vols, Rome 1943-65.
- Gruppo Archeologico Latino Colli Albani 'Bruno Martellotta', *L'Abbazia Greca di Grottaferrata*, Rome 2006.
- Guerrini, Paola, 'Il Bessarione a Grottaferrata: un'ipotesi sulla donazione dell'icona', *Studi Medievali*, 32, ser. 2 (1991), 807-14.
- Guarino Veronese, *Epistolario di Guarino Veronese*, ed. R. Sabbadini, Venice 1915-19.
- Haas, Claudia, 'A proposito degli affreschi nella cappella funeraria del Cardinale Bessarione ai SS Apostoli di Roma', *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte*, 13-14 (1981), 131-38.
- Hall, Edwin, *Sweynheym and Pannartz and the Origins of Printing in Italy*, McMinnville, Oregon 1991.
- Hall, James, *The Sinister Side: How Left-Right Symbolism Shaped Western Art*, Oxford 2008.
- Hankins, James, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, Leiden and New York 1990.
- , 'Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 49 (1995), 122-207.
- , *Humanism and Platonism in the Renaissance*, Rome 2003-04.
- Harris, Jonathan, *Greek Emigres in the West 1400-1520*, Camberley 1995.

----, 'Being a Byzantine after Byzantium: Hellenic Identity in Renaissance Italy', *Kampos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek*, 8 (2000), 25-44.

Harrison, S.J., *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist*, Oxford 2000.

Hedberg, Gregory, 'Antoniazio Romano and his School', PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1980.

Helmuth, Johannes, *Das Basler Konzil, 1431-1449 : Forschungsstand und Probleme*, Köln 1987.

Hirsch, Rudolph, 'Early Printed Latin Translations of Greek Texts', first printed in *Variorum* 1978, reprinted in *The Printed Word: Its Impact and Diffusion*, ed. Rudolph Hirsch, London 1978, VI.

----, 'The Size of Editions of Books Produced by Sweynheym and Pannartz between 1465 and 1471', first printed in *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, Mainz 1957, reprinted in *The Printed Word: Its Impact and Diffusion*, ed. Rudolph Hirsch, London 1978, XVI.

Hoeniger, Cathleen, *The Renovation of Paintings in Tuscany, 1250-1500*, Cambridge 1995.

Housley, N., *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400-1536*, Oxford 2002

Howard, Deborah, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven and London 1975.

Howe, Eunice D., 'The Miraculous Madonna in Fifteenth-Century Roman Painting', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, 8-9 (1982-83), 1-21.

Hussey, Joan Mervyn, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, Oxford 1986.

*Indice generale degli incunaboli delle biblioteche d'Italia*, ed. T. M. Guarnaschelli, E. Valenziani and E. Cerulli, 4 vols, Rome 1943-65.

Infessura, Stefano, *Diario della Città di Roma*, ed. Oreste Tommasini, Rome 1890.

Jacobsen, Michael, 'Vulcan Forging Cupid's Wings', *Art Bulletin*, 54 (1972), 418-29.

Janin, R., *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin. Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique. Les églises et les monastères*, Paris 1953.

John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth, New York 2003.

Joliet-Lévy, Catherine, 'Note sur la représentation des archanges en costume imperial dans l'iconographie byzantine', *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 46 (1998), 121-28.

Jones, Howard, *Printing the Classical Text*, 't Goy-Houten 2004.

Kalra, Vrinder, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk, *Diaspora and Hybridity*, London and New Delhi 2005.

**Karahan, Anne**, *Byzantine Holy Images: Transcendence and Immanence: The Theological Background of the Iconography and Aesthetics of the Chora Church*, Leuven, Paris and Walpole, Mass. 2010.

**Kenney, E.J.**, 'The Character of Humanist Philology', in *Classical Influences on European Culture, AD 500-1500*, Cambridge 1971, 119-30.

**King, David**, 'The Astrolabe Presented by Regiomontanus to Cardinal Bessarion in 1462', *Nuncius* (9), 1994, 165-204.

**Kotoula, Dmitra**, 'Founding for Salvation: The Burial Chapel of the Founder in Byzantine Monastic Institutions and its Decoration', PhD diss., The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2006.

**Krautheimer, Richard**, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae: Le basiliche cristiane di Rome*, vol.1, Vatican City 1937.

**Kraye, Jill**, 'Philologists and Philosophers', *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye, Cambridge 1996, 142-60.

**Kristeller, Paul**, 'Neoplatonismo e Rinascimento', *Il Veltro* (35, 1-2), 1991, 25-37.

**Kruger, Klaus**, 'Medium and Imagination: Aesthetic Aspects of Trecento Panel Painting', *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. Victor M. Schmidt, New Haven and London 2002, 57-82.

**Labowsky, Lotte**, 'An Unknown Treatise by Theodorus Gaza', *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 6 (1968), 173-98.

----, 'An Unnoticed Letter of Bessarion to Lorenzo Valla', *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, eds J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson, Oxford 1976, 366-75.

----, *Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana: Six Early Inventories*, Rome 1979.

**Laurent, M.-H.**, and A. Guillou, *Le 'Liber Visitationis' d'Athanase Chalkéopoulos (1457-8)*, Studi e Testi, 1960.

**Laurent, V.**, 'La Succession épiscopale de Trébizonde', *Archeion Pontou*, 21 (1956), 80-94.

**Lee, Egmont**, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters*, Rome 1978.

**Le Grand, Emile**, *Cent-dix lettres grecques de François Filelfe: publiées intégralement pour la première fois d'après le Codex Trivulzianus 873*, trans. and ed., Emile Legrand, Paris 1892.

**Levi, Anthony**, 'Ficino, Augustine and the Pagans', *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J.B. Allen and Valery Rees, Leiden/Boston/Cologne 2002, 99-114.

**Levi d'Ancona, M.**, *The Wildenstein Collection of Illuminations: The Lombard School*, Florence 1970.

**Lollini, Fabrizio**, 'Il Cardinale Bessarione e le arte figurative', PhD diss., University of Bologna, 2 vols 1986-87.

- , 'Bologna, Ferrara, Cesena: 'I corali del Bessarione tra circuiti umanistici e percorsi di artisti', *Corali Miniati del Quattrocento nella Biblioteca Malatestiana*, ed. Piero Lucchi, Milan 1989, 19-36.
- , 'La Cappella di Bessarione ai santi Apostoli: una riconsiderazione', *Arte Cristiana*, 742, vol. 79 (1991), 7-22.
- , 'Bessarione e le arti figure', *Bessarione e l'Umanesimo*, ed. Gianfranco Fiaccadori, Naples 1994.
- , 'Volumi Liturgici miniati nel territorio Cesenate', *Storia della chiesa di Cesena*, ed. Marino Mengozzi, Cesena 1998, 225-49.
- Lowden, John**, 'Luxury and Liturgy: The Function of Books', *Church and People in Byzantium*, ed. Rosemary Morris, Birmingham 1990.
- , 'Byzantium Perceived through Illuminated Manuscripts: Now and Then', *Through the Looking Glass: Byzantium through British Eyes*, ed. Robin Cormack and Elizabeth Jeffreys, Aldershot 2000, 85-106.
- , 'The Transmission of "Visual Knowledge" in Byzantium through Illuminated Manuscripts: Approaches and Conjectures', *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Catherine Holmes and Judith Waring, Leiden 2002, 59-79.
- Lowry, Martin**, 'Aldus Manutius and Benedetto Bordon: In Search of a Link', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 66 (1983), 173-97.
- , 'Diplomacy and the Spread of Printing', *Bibliography and the Study of Fifteenth-Century Civilization*, British Library Occasional Papers, 5 (1987), 121-46.
- Luciani**, 'Minoranze significative nella biblioteca del Cardinale Domenico Capranica', *Scrittura, Biblioteche e Stampa a Roma nel Quattrocento*, ed. Concetta Bianca, Vatican City 1980, 167-82.
- Ludovici, Sergio Samek**, 'La introduzione della stampa in Italia: Sweynheym, Pannartz, Bussi e Nicolo Cusano', *Italia grafica*, 19 (1964), 9-35.
- Lymberopoulou, Angeliki**, *The Church of the Archangel Michael at Kavalariana: Art and Society on Fourteenth-Century Venetian-Dominated Crete*, London 2006.
- , 'Audiences and Markets for Cretan Icons', *Viewing Renaissance Art*, ed. Kim Woods, Carol M. Richardson and Angeliki Lymberopoulou, New Haven and London 2007, 171-206.
- McManus, Chris**, *Right Hand, Left Hand: The Origins of Asymmetry in Brains, Bodies, Atoms and Cultures*, London 2002.
- Maguire, Henry**, 'Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art', *Gesta*, 28 (1989), 217-31.
- , 'A Murderer among the Angels: The Frontispiece Miniatures of Paris.Gr.510 and the Iconography of the Archangels in Byzantine Art', *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker, Chicago 1995, 63-71.
- , *The Icons of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium*, New Jersey 1996.

**Maillard-Luypaert, Monique**, 'D'une "image de Notre-Dame" l'autre genèse et origines de la dévotion à Notre-Dame de Grace de Cambrai au 15ème siècle', *Cathédrale et dévotions aux époques médiévale et moderne: reliques, procession et pèlerinages à l'église-mère du diocèse*, ed. Catherine Vincent and Jacques Pycke, Louvain-la-Neuve 2010, 175-97.

**Malvasia, Bonaventura**, *Compendio Historico della Ven. Basilica di SS. Dodeci Apostoli sua Fondazione, Origine, Nobilita, Sito...Descritto dal P.F. Bonaventura Malvasia da Bologna*, Rome 1655.

**Mango, Cyril**, 'Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 28 (1965), 29-43.

----, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, New Jersey 1972.

**Marcon, Susy**, 'La Miniatura nei codici del cardinale Bessarione', *I luoghi della memoria scritta: manoscritti, incunaboli, libri a stampa di biblioteche statali italiane*, ed. G. Cavallo, Michigan 1994, 411-25.

**Marcon, Susy**, 'Miniatures in Latin Manuscripts Commissioned by Cardinal Bessarion', *Bessarione e l'Umanesimo*, Naples 1994, 197-228.

**Marti, Susan**, Till-Holger Borchert and Gabriele Keck, *Charles le Téméraire: faste et déclin de la cour de Bourgogne*, Bruges 2008.

**Martin, Jacquilyne E.**, 'Cardinal Bessarion, Mystical Theology and Spiritual Union between East and West', PhD diss., University of Manitoba 2000.

**Masai, François**, *Pléthon et le Platonisme de Mistra*, Paris 1956.

**Masini, Nicolo**, *Vita Malatestae Novelli Caeseniae Principis, et Bibliothecae huius eximiae conditoris*, transcribed from the Eccles. Signor Dottore Giovanni Ceccaroni Legista, 1584.

**Matteucci, Gualberto**, *La missione francescana di Constantinopoli*, 2 vols, Florence 1971.

**Medica, Massimo**, 'Alcune considerazioni per una presenza bolognese del "Maestro del Breviario Franciscano"', *Quaderno di studi sull'arte lombarda dai Visconti agli Sforza*, ed. Maria Teresa Balboni Brizza, Milan 1990, 72-76.

**Meiss, M. and E.W. Kirsch**, *The Visconti Hours*, New York 1972.

**Melograni, Anna**, 'Un Antifonario Ricomparso. Nuove Proposte per il Catalogo del Terzo Maestro del Bessarione', *Arte Bollettino*, 124 (2003), 9-26.

**Mercati, Giovanni**, *Ultimi contribute alla storia degli umanisti*, Fasc. 1: Traversariana, 1939

**Meserve, Margaret**, 'Patronage and Propaganda at the First Paris Press', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 97 (2003), 521-88.

----, 'Italian Humanists and the Problem of the Crusade', *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century: Message and Impact*, ed. Norman Housley, Basingstoke 2005, 13-38.

**Meyendorff, J.**, 'Was There an Encounter between East and West at Florence?', in Giuseppe Alberigo (ed), *Christian Unity: The Council of Ferrara-Florence 1438/39-1989*, Leuven 1991, 153-75.

- Michellini Tocci, Luigi**, 'La formazione della biblioteca di Federico da Montefeltro: codici contemporanei e libri a stampa', *Federico da Montefeltro: lo stato, le arti, la cultura*, ed. Giorgio Berboni Baiardi, Giorgio Chittolini and Pietro Floriani, 3 vols, Rome 1986, III, 9-18.
- Migne, J.-P.**, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, 144, Paris 1853.
- , *Patrologiae Graecae: Cursus Completus*, 161, Paris 1866.
- Minisci, Teodoro**, *Santa Maria di Grottaferrata*, Grottaferrata 1966.
- Mioni, Elpidio**, 'Bessarione Bibliofilo e Filologo', *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, n.s. 5 (1968), 61-83.
- , *Cento Codici Bessarionei: Catalogo di Mostra*, Venice 1968.
- , 'Bessarione scriba e alcune suoi collaboratori', *Miscellanea Marciana e studi bessarionei*, 24 (1976), 263-318.
- Modigliani, Anna**, *Tipografi a Roma prima della stampa: due società per fare libri con le forme (1466-1470)*, Rome 1989.
- Moffitt Watts, Pauline**, *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, Leiden 1982.
- Mohler, Ludwig**, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist, und Staatsmann: Funde und Forschungen*, Paderborn 1923-41.
- Monfasani, John**, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of his Rhetoric and Logic*, Leiden 1976.
- , 'Bessarion Latinus', *Rinascimento*, ser. 2, 21 (1981), 165-209.
- , *Il Perotti e la controversia platonici ed aristotelici*, Kansas 1981.
- , 'Still More on Bessarion Latinus', *Rinascimento*, s. 2, 23 (1983), 217-35.
- , 'The Byzantine Rhetorical Tradition and the Renaissance', *Renaissance Eloquence*, ed. J.J. Murphy, Los Angeles 1983, 174-87.
- , 'Alexius Celadenus and Ottaviano Ubaldini: An Epilogue to Bessarion's Relationship with the Court of Urbino', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 46 (1984), 95-110.
- , 'The First Call for Press Censorship: Niccolò Perotti, Giovanni Bussi, Antonio Moreto and the Editing of Pliny's *Natural History*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 41, no. 1 (1988), 1-43.
- , 'Bessarion, Valla, Agricola, and Erasmus', *Rinascimento*, ser. 2, 28 (1988), 319-20.
- , 'Testi inediti di Bessarione e Teodoro Gaza', *Dotti bizantini e libri greci nell'Italia del secolo XV: Atti del Convegno international, Trento 22-23 ottobre 1990*, Naples 1992, 231-56.
- , 'Platonic Paganism in the Fifteenth Century', *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy: Cardinal Bessarion and Other Emigres*, Aldershot 1995, no. X.

- , 'Giovanni Gatti of Messina: A Profile and an Unedited Text', *Filologia umanistica per Gianvito Resta*, ed. V. Fera and G. Ferrau, 3 vols., Padua 1997, II:1315-38.
- , 'Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy', *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J.B. Allen and Valery Rees, Leiden/Boston/Cologne 2002, 179-202.
- , 'A tale of two books: Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis* and George of Trebizond's *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*', *Renaissance Studies*, 22, issue 1 (February 2008), 1-15.
- , 'Two Fifteenth-Century "Platonic Academies": Bessarion's and Ficino's', *On Renaissance Academies. Proceedings of the International Conference 'From the Roman Academy to the Danish Academy in Rome'*, Rome 2011, 61-76.
- , '*Bessarion Scholasticus*': *A Study of Cardinal Bessarion's Latin Library*, Turnhout 2012.
- Moorman, John**, *A History of the Franciscan Order: From its Origins to the Year 1517*, Oxford 1968.
- Moreau, J.**, 'De la concordance d'Aristote avec Platon', *XVIème Colloque International de Tours, Platon et Aristote à la Renaissance*, Tours 1976, 45-58.
- Mouriki, Doula**, 'The Wall Paintings at Mistra: Models of a Painters' Workshop in the Fifteenth Century', in *The Twilight of Byzantium: Aspects of Cultural and Religious History in the Late Byzantine Empire*, ed. Slobodan Curcic and Doula Mouriki, Princeton 1989, 217-50.
- Muccioli, Giuseppe Maria**, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Malatestianae Caesenatis Bibliothecae Fratrum Minorum Conventualium fidei custodiaeque concreditae historica praefatione, variisque adnotationibus illustratus*, II, Cesena 1784.
- Muntz, Eugène**, *Les Arts à la Cour des Papes pendant le VXème e le XVIème siècle*, II: Paul II (1464-1471), Paris 1879.
- Muntz, Eugène and Paul Fabre**, *La Bibliothèque du Vatican at XV Siècle d'après des documents inédits*, Paris 1887.
- Murzaku, Ines Angjeli**, 'Between East and West: The Basilian Monks of Grottaferrata in Albania', *Strengthening Religious Tolerance for a Secure Civil Society in Albania and the Southern Balkans*, ed. James Pettifer and Mentor Nazarko, Amsterdam 2007, 102-111.
- Nagel, Alexander, and Christopher S. Wood**, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York 2010.
- Nasalli Rocca di Corneliano, Emilio**, 'Il Card. Bessarione: Legato Pontificio in Bologna', *Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Romagne*, Ser. 4,20 (1931), 1-64.
- Negri Arnoldi, Francesco**, 'Madonne giovanili di Antoniazio Romano', *Commentari*, 15 (1964), 202-12.
- Nelson, Robert S.**, 'The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts', c. 1200-1450', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 49 (1995), 205-39.
- Nicholas de Cues**, 'Le Tableau ou la vision de Dieu', introduced and translated, Agnès Minazzoli, Paris 1986.

- Nicol, Donald, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge and New York, 1988.
- , 'The Byzantine View of Papal Sovereignty', *The Church and Sovereignty, c.590-1918: Essays in Honour of Michael Wilks*, ed. Diana Wood, Oxford 1991, 173-86.
- Noehles, Gisela, 'Antoniazio Romano. Studien zur Quattrocentomalerei in Rom', PhD thesis, Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster, 1973.
- O'Daly, Gerard, *Platonism Pagan and Christian: Studies in Plotinus and Augustine*, London 2001.
- Oakley, Francis, *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church, 1300-1870*, Oxford 2003.
- Oikonomides, Nicolas, 'The Holy Icon as an Asset', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991), 35-44.
- Omont, Henri, 'Inventaire de la bibliothèque de Ferdinand d'Aragon roi de Naples (1481)', *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole de Chartes*, 70 (1909), 456-70.
- Ostrow, Steven, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore*, Cambridge 1996.
- Otranto, Giorgio, 'Il "Liber d'Apparitione" e il culto di S. Michele sul Gargano nella documentazione liturgica altomedievale', *Vetera Christianorum*, 18 (1981), 423-42.
- Ousterhout, Robert G., *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*, Washington 1987.
- Pace, Valentino, 'Presenze e Influenze Ciproite nella Pittura Duecentesca Italiana', *Corso di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina*, 32 (1985), 259-98.
- Pacht, Otto, 'Notes and Observations on the Origin of Humanistic Book-Decoration', *Fritz Saxl: 1890-1948: A Volume of Memorial Essays from his friends in England*, ed. D.J. Gordon, London 1957, 184-94.
- Palermينو, R., 'The Roman Academy, the Catacombs and the Conspiracy of 1468', *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 18 (1980), 117-55.
- Paolucci, Antonio, *Antoniazio Romano: Catalogo completo*, Florence 1992.
- Partner, Peter, *The Papal State under Martin V: The Administration and Government of the Temporal Power in the Early Fifteenth Century*, London 1958.
- Papadakis, Aristeides (in collaboration with John Meyendorff), *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453 A.D.*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1994.
- Pasini, Pier Giorgio, *Malatesta Novello Magnifico Signore: Arte e Cultura di un Principe del Rinascimento*, Bologna 2002.
- Pastor, Ludwig von, *The History of the Popes, From the Close of the Middle Ages*, 8 vols, London 1899-1908.



- Peers, Glen, *Apprehending the Archangel Michael: hagiographic methods*, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 20 (1996), 100-121.
- , 'Holy Man, Supplicant, and Donor: On Representations of the Miracle of the Archangel Michael at Chonae', *Medieval Studies*, (1997), 173-82.
- , 'Imagination and Angelic Epiphany', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 21 (1997), 113-31.
- Pera, Loredana, 'La Platea del Bessarione: Un patrimonio ricomposto', *Santa Maria di Grottaferrata e il Cardinale Bessarione: Fonti e Studi sulla Prima Commenda*, ed. Maria Teresa Caciorgna, Rome 2005, 35-77.
- Perocco, Guido, *Carpaccio nella Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni*, Venice 1964.
- Peruzzi, Marcella, 'The Library of Glorious Memory: History of the Montefeltro Collection', in *Federico da Montefeltro and his Library*, ed. J. Alexander, Italy, 2007, 29-39.
- Petrucci, Armando, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy*, trans. and ed. Charles M. Radding, New Haven 1995.
- Petta, Marco, 'L'Inventario degli Oggetti del Monastero di Grottaferrata nel 1462', *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata*, 42 (1988), 93-114.
- Pettegree, Andrew, *The Book in the Renaissance*, New Haven and London 2010.
- Philippe, Jules, *Guillaume Fichet: Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres*, Annecy 1892.
- Piazzoni, Ambrogio M., *La Bibbia di Federico da Montefeltro*, Vatican City 2005, 2 vols.
- Piccolomini, Silvius Aeneas, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, ed. W.D. Gray and H.U. Underwood, trans. Florence Alden Gragg, *Smith College Studies in History*, Northampton, Mass. 1951.
- , *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius: Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)*, introduced and translated by Thomas M. Izbicki, Gerald Christianson, and Philip Krey, Washington 2006.
- Pignatti, Terisio, and Brian Pullan, *Le Scuole di Venezia*, Milan 1981.
- Pius II, *Commentaries*, ed. M. Meserve and M. Simonetta, Harvard and London 2003.
- Platina, Bartolommeo, *The Lives of the Popes from the Accession of Gregory VII to the Death of Paul II*, trans. Rev. W. Benham, London 1888.
- Pletho, George Gemistos, *Traité des lois ou recueil des fragments, en partie inédits, de cet ouvrage, texte revu sur les manuscrits, précédé d'une notice historique et critique, et augmenté d'un choix de pièces justificatives, la plupart inédites*, ed. C. Alexandre, Amsterdam 1967.
- Polacco, Renato, 'La Storia del reliquario Bessarione dopo il rinvenimento del verso della croce scomparsa', *Saggi e Memorie di storia dell'arte*, 18 (1992), 87-94.
- Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, ed. John Farina, New York 1987.

- Quirini, A.M., *Liber singularis de optimorum scriptorum editionibus quae Romae primum prodierunt post divinum typographiae inventum*, Lindau 1761.
- Richardson, Brian, 'The Debates on Printing in Renaissance Italy', *La Bibliofilia*, 100 (1998), 135-55.
- , *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge 1999.
- , *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge 2009.
- Richardson, Carol M., *Reclaiming Rome: Cardinals in the Fifteenth Century*, Leiden and Boston 2009.
- Ringbom, Sixten, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, *Acta Academiae Aboensis*, Ser. A, 31 (1965).
- Robertson, Ian, 'Paul II: Zentihomo de Venecia e Pontifico', *War, Culture and Society in Renaissance Venice*, ed. David S. Chambers, Cecil H. Clough and Michael E. Mallett, London and Ohio 1993, 147-72.
- , *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter: Pope Paul II and Bologna*, Turnhout 2002.
- Robin, Diana, *Filelfo in Milan*, Princeton 1991.
- Rocchi, A., *La Badia di Grottaferrata*, Rome 1904.
- Ross, James Bruce and Mary Martin McLaughlin, *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, London 1968.
- Rouse, Mary A. and Richard H. Rouse, 'Nicolaus Gupalatinus and the Arrival of Print in Italy', *La Bibliofilia*, 88 (1986), 221-51.
- Rubinstein, R.O., 'Pius II's Piazza S. Pietro and St Andrew's Head', *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, London 1967, 221-30.
- Runciman, S., *The Fall of Constantinople*, Cambridge 1965.
- Ruysschaert, José, 'Sixte IV, fondateur de la Bibliothèque Vaticane (15 juin 1475)', *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 7 (1969), 513-24.
- Saffrey, H.D., *Recherches sur quelques autographes du Cardinal Bessarion et leur caractère autobiographique*, Rome 1964.
- Safran, William, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora*, 1, no. 1 (1991), 83-99.
- Saint Basil, *Saint Basil: The Letters*, trans. and ed. Roy J. Deferrari, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., 1961.
- Saint Benedict, *The Rule of St Benedict in Latin and in English*, ed. Timothy Fry, Collegeville 1981.
- Saraco, Alessandro, *Il Cardinale Capranica (1400-1458) e la riforma della chiesa*, Rome 2004.

**Sartori, Antonio**, 'Documenti padovani sull'arte della stampa nel sec. XV', *Libri e stampatori a Padova: miscellanea di studi storici in onore di mons. G. Bellini*, tipografico editore libraio, Padua 1959, 111-231.

**Saxer, Victor**, 'Le Missel du Cardinal Bessarion', *Scriptorium, Revue Internationale des Etudes Relatives aux Manuscrits*, 26, 1972, 302-13.

---, 'Jalons pour servir à l'histoire du culte de l'archange Saint Michel en Orient jusqu'à l'Iconoclisme', *Noscere Sancta Miscellanea in Memoria di Agostino Amore OFM*, ed. Isaac Vazquez Janeiro, Vol 1: 'Storia della Chiesa, Archeologia, Arte', 1985, 357-426.

**Schioppalalba, Johannes Baptista**, *In Perantiquam Sacram Tabulam Graecam Insigni Sodalitio Sanctae Mariae Caritatis Venetiarum ab Amplissimo Cardinali Bessarione Dono Datam Dissertatio*, 1767.

**Schirò, Giuseppe**, 'Il Bessarione e la Cultura Classica e Bizantina D'Occidente', *Miscellanea Francesca*, 73 (1973), 351-66.

**Schmitt, Charles**, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, Cambridge, Mass. 1983.

**Scholarios, George**, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Louis Petit, X. A. Siderides, Martin Jugie, Paris 1928-36.

**Scholderer, Victor**, 'Printers and Readers in the Fifteenth Century', in *Fifty Essays in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Bibliography*, Amsterdam 1966, 202-15.

---, 'The Petition of Sweynheym and Pannartz to Sixtus IV', *Fifty Essays in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Bibliography*, ed. Dennis Rhodes, Amsterdam 1966, 72-73.

**Schulz, Peter**, 'George Gemistos Plethon (ca.1360-1454); George of Trebizond (1396-1472); Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472): The Controversy between the Platonists and the Aristotelians in the Fifteenth Century', *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, ed. Richard Blum, Washington D.C. 2010, 23-32.

**Setton, Kenneth**, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571*, 4 vols, Philadelphia 1976-1984.

**Sevcenko, Ihor**, 'Intellectual Repercussions of the Council of Florence', *Church History*, 24 (1955), 291-323.

---, 'The Palaeologan Renaissance', in *Renaissances before the Renaissance: Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Warren Treadgold, Stanford 1984, 61-81.

**Sorbelli, Albano** (ed.), *Corpus chronicorum bononiensium*, 4 vols, Città di Castello 1906-.

**Spatharakis, Ioannis**, *The Left-Handed Evangelist: A Contribution to Palaeologan Iconography*, London 1988.

**Spencer, Eleanor**, 'L'Horloge de Sapience (Bruxelles, Bibliothèque royale, ms. IV, 111)', *Scriptorium*, 17 (1963), 277-99.

---, 'Le Lectionnaire du Cardinal de Bourbon', *Les Dossiers de l'archéologie*, 16 (mai-juin 1976), 124-29.

- Staikos, Konstantinos Sp.**, *The History of the Library in Western Civilization: From Constantine the Great to Cardinal Bessarion*, Delaware, MS't Goy-Houten, Athens 2007.
- Stano, Gaetano**, 'La "Genealogia Seraphica" del P. Ilario Altobelli seniore, O.F.M. Conv. (1560-1637)', *Miscellanea Francescana*, 44 (1944), 88-110.
- Sterling, C.**, *La Peinture médiévale à Paris, 1300-1500*, 2 vols, Paris 1987-90.
- Stieber, Joachim W.**, *Pope Eugenius IV, The Council of Basel and the Secular and Ecclesiastical Authorities in the Empire: The Conflict over Supreme Authority and Power in the Church*, Leiden 1978.
- Stormon, E.J.**, 'Bessarion before the Council of Florence: A Survey of his Early Writings (1423-1437)', *Byzantina Australiensia*, 1 (1981), 128-56.
- Syropoulos, Sylvester**, *Les Mémoires de Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438-1439)*, ed. V. Laurent, Paris-Rome 1971.
- Taft, Robert F.**, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History*, Minnesota 1992.
- Tatakis, Basil**, *Byzantine Philosophy*, trans. Nicholas Moutafakis, Cambridge 2003.
- Thomson, John A.F.**, *Popes and Princes, 1417-1517: Politics and Polity in the Late Medieval Church*, London 1980.
- Tiberia, Vitaliano**, *Antoniazio Romano per il Cardinale Bessarione a Roma*, Todi 1992.
- Toews, John B.**, 'Pope Eugenius IV and the Concordat of Vienna (1448) – An Interpretation', *Church History*, 34 (1965), 178-94.
- Toubert, Hélène**, 'L'encadrement des illustrations', in *Mise en page et mise en text e du livre manuscrit*, ed. Henri-Jean Martin and Jean Vezin, Paris 1990, 393-99.
- Trapp, Erich**, 'Lateinische Humanistenbriefe zu Bessarions Schrift "In Calumniatorem Platonis"', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft*, 28 (1979), 141-65.
- Tsirpanlis, Constantine**, *Mark Eugenicus and the Council of Florence: A Historical Re-Evaluation of his Personality*, Thessalonike 1974.
- Turner, C.J.**, 'The Career of George Gennadius Scholarius', *Byzantion*, 34 (1969-70), 420-55.
- Ullman, Berthold**, and Philip Stadter, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence: Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de' Medici and the Library of San Marco*, 1972.
- Underwood, Paul**, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, New York 1966.
- Uspensky, Boris**, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon*, Ghent 1976.
- Vacalopoulos, Apostolos**, *Origins of the Greek Nation: The Byzantine Period, 1204-1461*, New Jersey 1970.
- Vast, Henri**, *Le cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472:) étude sur le chrétienté et la renaissance vers le milieu du XVe siècle*, Paris 1878.
- Vaughan, Richard**, *Charles the Bold: The Last Valois Duke of Burgundy*, London 1973.

- Verde, Armando F., *Lo Studio fiorentino 1473-1503: ricerche e documenti*, 4 vols, Florence 1973-85.
- Verdon, Timothy, *Alla riscoperta delle chiese di Firenze: Santa Croce*, Florence 2004.
- Veronese, Guarino, *Epistolario di Guarino Veronese*, ed. Remigio Sabbadini, Venice 1915.
- Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite: edizione critica con introduzione e commento di Aulo Greco*, Florence 1970-76.
- Vikan, Gary, 'Ruminations on Edible Icons: Originals and Copies in the Art of Byzantium', *Studies in the History of Art*, 20 (1989), 47-59.
- Volterranus, G., *Volumen antiquus res Basilicae xii Apostolorum*, 1454 (BAV.Vat.lat.5560).
- Voragine, Jacques de, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. W.G. Ryan, vol. 11, Princeton 1993.
- Walbeck, Osten, 'The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Refugee Communities', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28, no. 2 (2002), 221-38.
- Walsh, R.J., *Charles the Bold and Italy: Politics and Personnel 1467-1477*, Liverpool 2005.
- Warner, Marina, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, London 1978.
- Ware, Kallistos, 'Scholasticism and Orthodoxy: Theological Method as a Factor in the Schism', *Eastern Churches Review*, 5.1 (1973), 16-27.
- Watanabe, Morimichi, 'Pope Eugenius IV, the Conciliar Movement, and the Primacy of Rome', *The Church, the Councils and Reform: The Legacy of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Gerald Christianson, Thomas Izbicki and Christopher Bellitto, Washington 2008, 177-93.
- Weiss, Anton, *Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini als Papst Pius II: sein Leben und Einfluss auf die literarische Cultur Deutschlands*, Graz 1897.
- Weiss, Roberto, *Un umanista veneziano: Papa Paolo II*, Rome 1958.
- , 'Two Unnoticed "Portraits" of Cardinal Bessarion', *Italian Studies*, 22 (1967), 1-5.
- Wilson, Jean C., 'Reflections on St Luke's Hand: Icons and the Nature of Aura in the Burgundian Low Countries during the Fifteenth Century', *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker, Chicago 1995, 132-46.
- Wilson, Nigel, 'The Libraries of the Byzantine World', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 8 (1967), 53-80.
- , 'Books and Readers in Byzantium', *Byzantine Books and Bookmen*, Dumbarton Oaks, Harvard 1975, 1-4.
- , 'The Book Trade in Venice, ca. 1400-1515', in *Venezia: Centro di Mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente (Secoli XV-XVI). Aspetti e Problemi*, ed. Hans-Georg Beck, Manoussos Manoussacas and Agostino Pertusi, vol. II, Florence 1977, 381-97.
- , *From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, Alessandria 1992.

Wolff, Robert Lee, 'The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', *Traditio*, 2 (1944), 213-37.

Woodhouse, C.M., *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford 1986.

Zacour, Norman, 'The Cardinal's View of the Papacy, 1150-1300', *The Religious Role of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities 1150-1300*, ed. Christopher Ryan, Toronto 1989, 413-38.

Zanetti, Latina et Italica d. Marci Bibliotheca: *Codicum Manuscriptorum: Per titulos digesta. Praeside et moderator Laurentio Theupolo Equite AC D. Marci Proc. Iussu senatus*, 1741.

Zanichelli, Giuseppa, Z., *Luminatum et ligatum fuit de manu mea: Codici miniati padani: scriptoria e committenza*, Parma 1994.

Zazzeri, R., *Sui codici e libri a stampa della biblioteca Malatestiana di Cesena. Ricerche e osservazioni*, Cesena 1887.

Zorzi, Marino, 'La circolazione del libro a Venezia nel Cinquecento: biblioteche private e pubbliche', *Ateneo veneto*, 177 (1990), 117-89.

---, 'Bessarione e Venezia', *Bessarione e l'umanesimo: Catalogo della mostra*, ed. Gianfranco Fiaccadori, Naples 1994, 197-228.

---, 'Il Cardinale Bessarione e la sua biblioteca', *I Luoghi della Memoria Scritta: Manoscritti, incunaboli, libri a stampa di Biblioteche statali Italiane*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo, Rome 1994, 391-410.

---, 'Bessarione e i codici greci', *L'Eredità Greca e L'Ellenismo Veneziano*, ed. Gino Benzoni, Venice 2002.

# **Culture, Humanism and Intellect: Cardinal Bessarion as Patron of the Arts**

**Laura Bolick**

**Volume II**

**Illustrations**

**Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Open University**

**13 May 2013**

## List of Illustrations

1. Paolo Romano (attrib.), Pope Pius II's Tomb: detail showing Bessarion presenting the head of St Andrew to Pius II, after 1464. S. Andrea delle Valle, Rome.
2. Antoniazio Romano. *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Gargano* and *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Tumba*, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist, SS Apostoli, Rome.
3. Antoniazio Romano. *Ceiling dome*: detail showing the lower edge of Christ's robe, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
4. Italian. *St Eugenia*: detail of the lower register, 17<sup>th</sup> century, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
5. Italian. *St Claudia*: detail of the lower register, 17<sup>th</sup> century, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist, SS Apostoli, Rome.
6. Original site of the 15th-century aedicule framing Antoniazio Romano's icon. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
7. Antoniazio Romano. Decorative frieze separating upper and middle registers, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
8. Antoniazio Romano. Decorative candelabra separating panels vertically, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
9. Antoniazio Romano. *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Tumba*: detail of shells, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
10. Vitaliano Tiberia's Reconstruction of the Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
11. Antoniazio Romano. *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Tumba*: detail of the procession, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.



12. Antoniazio Romano. *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Tumba*: detail of monks singing, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
13. Antoniazio Romano. *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Tumba*: detail of St Aubert, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
14. Antoniazio Romano. *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Gargano*, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
15. Italian. *St Michael Appearing on Monte Gargano*, c.1320s, fresco. Velluti Chapel, S. Croce, Florence.
16. School of Michelangelo. *St Michael Appearing on Monte Gargano*, c.1530s, fresco. Chateaufvillain Chapel, S. Trinità dei Monti, Rome.
17. Antoniazio Romano. *Angelic hierarchy*: detail of Seraphim and Cherubim, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
18. Antoniazio Romano. *Angelic hierarchy*: details of angels in conversation, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
19. Antoniazio Romano. *Angelic hierarchy*: detail of angels (Powers) dressed in red, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
20. Coppo di Marcovaldo, *Thrones*, detail of the angelic hierarchy, second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century, mosaic. Baptistery, Florence.
21. Antoniazio Romano (attrib.). *Madonna Enthroned*: detail, 1468, fresco. Convent of S. Francesca Romana a Tor de'Specchi, Rome.
22. Antoniazio Romano (attrib.). *Choir of angels*: detail, 1468, fresco. Convent of S. Francesca Romana a Tor de'Specchi, Rome.
23. Lorenzo da Viterbo. *Assumption of the Virgin*: detail of the musical angels, 1469, fresco. Mazzatosta Chapel, S. Maria della Verità, Viterbo.

24. Bessarion's tomb, 1472, porphyry. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
25. Lorenzo da Viterbo. *Assumption of the Virgin*: detail of the head of an Apostle, 1469, fresco. Mazzatosta Chapel, S. Maria della Verità, Viterbo.
26. Antoniazio Romano. *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Tumba*: detail of the head of St Aubert, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
27. Lorenzo da Viterbo. *Assumption of the Virgin*: detail of the apostles' drapery, 1469, fresco. Mazzatosta Chapel, S. Maria della Verità, Viterbo.
28. Antoniazio Romano. *The Appearance of St Michael on Monte Tumba*: detail of St Aubert's robes, 1460s, fresco. Chapel of SS Eugenia, Michael the Archangel and John the Baptist.
29. Antoniazio Romano. *Madonna and Child Enthroned between SS Francis and Anthony of Padua*: St Anthony of Padua, 1467, panel. S. Francesco, Subiaco, Italy.
30. Antoniazio Romano. *Enthroned Madonna and Child Enthroned between SS Paul and Francis*: detail of the head of St Paul, 1460s, panel. Barberini Institute, Rome.
31. Antoniazio Romano. *The Annunciation and Cardinal Torquemada*, 1499-1500, panel. Chapel of the Annunciation, S. Maria sopra Minerva, Rome.
32. Antoniazio Romano. *Madonna and Child Enthroned between SS Francis and Anthony of Padua*, 1467, panel. S. Francesco, Subiaco, Italy.
33. Antoniazio Romano. *Madonna with Child*, 1460s, on panel. Chapel of S. Bonaventura, SS Apostoli, Rome.
34. Antoniazio Romano. *Madonna with Child*, 1486, on panel. Cathedral Museum, Velletri.
35. Antoniazio Romano. *Enthroned Madonna with SS Peter and Paul and the Judges of the Rota Tribunal*, 1490s, panel. Palazzi Apostolici, Vatican City.
36. Antoniazio Romano and workshop. *Madonna and Child*, reworked 13<sup>th</sup>-century icon. S. Maria in Cosmedin, Rome.

37. Unknown Artist. *Madonna and Child, 'Salus Populi'*, 12th century, panel. S. Maria del Popolo, Rome.
38. Unknown Artist. *Madonna and Child*, 13<sup>th</sup>-century icon donated by Bessarion, panel. Abbey of Grottaferrata.
39. Unknown Artist. *Icon with St Demetrios and Reliquary*, mosaic. Museo Civico, Sassoferato, Italy.
40. Unknown Artist. *Staurotheke of Cardinal Bessarion*. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.
41. Letter from Bessarion to Doge Mauro, Act of Donation, 1468, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat.z.14, f. 1.
42. Index for the Greek Books, Act of Donation, 1468, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat.z.14, f.16v.
43. Index for Latin Books, Act of Donation, 1468, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat.z.14, f. 42.
44. Franciscan monks singing, Antiphonary, *Corale 3*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, f. 7v.
45. Binding for choir book, Gradual, *Corale 1*, 15<sup>th</sup> century. Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana.
46. The twelve Apostles, Gradual, *Corale 1*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, f. 1.
47. The Adoration of the Magi, Gradual, *Corale 2*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, f. 68v.
48. Assumption of the Virgin, Antiphonary, *Corale 4*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, f. 1.
49. Illuminated initial 'A' showing a portrait of Cardinal Bessarion, Gradual, *Corale 2*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, f. 1.

50. Illuminated initial 'V' showing a portrait of Cardinal Bessarion, Gradual, *Corale* 5, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, f. 1.
51. Bessarion's coat of arms, Gradual, *Corale* 1, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, f. 1.
52. Bessarion's coat of arms, detail from St Augustine's *De Trinitate*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat.z.62, f. 1v.
53. Decorated initial 'S' in Origen's *Periarchon* (Book 3), 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat.z.38, f. 1.
54. Decorated initial 'C' in *De ea parte Evangelii*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat. z.438, f.1.
55. Frontispiece in Nicholas Sanuta, *De Ornatu Mulierum*, 1450-60, parchment. British Library, Sloane 2377, f.1.
56. Decorated initial 'F' in Pliny's *Letters*, c.1450-69, parchment. British Library, Burney 230, f. 1.
57. Decorated initial 'D' in George of Trebizond, *De quatuor declinabilibus partibus ex Prisciani compendium*, 1475, parchment. British Library, Harley 2577, f.1.
58. Frontispiece in Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *Carmina*, 1475-1500, parchment. British Library, Harley 3510, f. 2.
59. Frontispiece to Bessarion, *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat. z.135, ff.5v-6.
60. Illuminated initial 'M' in Lactantius' *Works*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat.z.40, f.3.
61. Decorated folio, *Four Gospels and Hebrews*, 1366, parchment. London, British Library, Burney 18, f.101.
62. Decorated folio, *Four Evangelists*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Gr.z.8, f.192.

63. Decorated folio, The Four Gospels adapted for liturgical service, 1291 or 1292, parchment. London, British Library, Burney 21, f. 9.
64. Historiated initial 'I' in *Book of Genesis*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Gr.z.5, f. 1.
65. Historiated initial, *Book of Genesis* in 'The Bible of the Robert Bello', parchment, Canterbury, 1240-53, London, British Library, Burney 3, f.5v.
66. Zoomorphic figure in Plato's *Works*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Gr.z.187, f. 159v.
67. Illuminated initial depicting St Augustine in his studio in St Augustine's *De Trinitate*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat.z.62, f. 1v.
68. Vittorio Carpaccio, *St Augustine in His Study*, c. 1502-07, tempera on panel. Venice, Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni.
69. Frontispiece to Cardinal Bessarion's *Orationes* presented to King Edward IV of England, 1472, parchment. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica, Vat.lat.3586, fol. 4.
70. Frontispiece to Guillaume Fichet's *De Rhetorica*, parchment. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Membr. 53.
71. Domenico de Rossi, Ground Plan for SS. Apostoli (*Studio d'architettura civile*, vol. 3, 1721, fol.19)
72. Anonymous, SS Apostoli Ground Plan, 1805/50, Drawing (BIASA, Coll. Lanciani)
73. Tomb of Cardinal Bessarion, SS Apostoli